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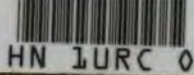
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# BROOKE'S DAUGHTER

BY

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"THE LUCK OF THE HOUSE," "A LIFE SENTENCE," ETC., ETC.

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# BROOKE'S DAUGHTER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE END OF HER CHILDHOOD.

THE Convent of the Annonciades, situated in a secluded spot on the outskirts of Paris, has long been well reputed as an educational establishment for young ladies of good family. The sisters themselves are women of refinement and cultivation, and the antecedents of every pupil received by them are most carefully inquired into: so carefully, indeed, that admission to the Convent School is looked on almost as a certificate of noble birth and unimpeachable orthodoxy. The Ladies of the Annonciades have indeed lately relaxed their rules, so far as to receive as parlor-boarders some very rich American girls and the children of a Protestant English marquis; but wealth in the first instance, and birth in the second, counterbalance the objections that might be raised to their origin or their faith. These exceptions to the rule are, however, few and far between; and, in spite of the levelling tendencies of our democratic days, Annonciades Convent is still one of the most exclusive and aristocratic establishments of the kind in Europe.

Although we know too well that small-minded jealousy, strife, and bickering must exist in a community of women cut off so entirely from the outer world as in this Convent of the Annonciades, it must be confessed that the very name and air of the place possess a certain romantic charm. The house is old, turreted like a château, overgrown with clematis and passion-flower. The grounds, enclosed by high mossy walls, are of great extent, and beautifully laid



out. The long chestnut avenue, the sparkling fountains, the trim flower-beds, are the delight of the sisters' hearts. The green beauty of the garden, and the grey stones of the ancient building, form a charming background for the white-veiled women who glide with noiseless footsteps along the cloisters or the avenue: a background more becoming to them even than to the bevy of girls in their everyday grey frocks, or their Sunday garb of white and blue. For the sisters' quaint and graceful dress harmonizes with the antique surroundings of building and ornament as anything younger and more modern fails to do.

These women—shut off from the world, and knowing little of its joys or sorrows—have a strangely tranquil air. With some the tranquility verges on childishness. One feels that they have not conquered the world, they have but escaped it; and, as one pities the soldier who flies the battle, so one mourns for the want of courage which has condemned these women to an inglorious peace. But here and there another kind of face is to be seen. Here and there we come across a countenance bearing the tragic impress of toil and grief and passion; and we feel it possible that in this haven alone perhaps could a nature which had striven and suffered so greatly find in the end a lasting place. But such faces are fortunately few and far between.

From the wide low window of the great *salle d'étude* a flight of steps with carved stone balustrades led into the garden. The balustrades were half-covered with clustering white roses and purple clematis on the day of which I write; and a breath of perfume, almost overpowering in its sweetness, was wafted every now and then from the beds of mignonette and lilies on either side. The brilliant sunshine of an early September day was not yet touched with the melancholy of autumn: the leaves of the Virginia creeper had not yet changed to scarlet, nor had the chestnuts yellowed as if winter was creeping on apace. Everything was still, warm and bright.

The stillness was partly accounted for by the fact that most of the pupils had gone home for their summer holidays. The *salle d'étude* was empty and a little desolate: no hum of busy voices came from its open window to the garden; and even the tranquil sisters seemed to miss the sound, and to look wistfully at the bare desks and unused benches of their schoolroom. For they loved their pupils

and their work ; both came, perhaps, as a welcome break in the monotony of their barren lives ; and they were sorry when the day came for their scholars to leave them for a time. Still more did they grieve when the inevitable day of a final departure arrived. They knew—some by hearsay, some by experience, and some by instinct alone—that the going away from school into the world was the beginning of a new life, full, very often, of danger and temptation, in which the good sisters and their teaching were likely to be forgotten, and it was a sorrow to them to be henceforth dissociated from the thoughts and lives of those who had often been under their guardianship and tuition for many years. Such a parting—probably a final one—was now imminent, and not a few of the sisters were troubled by the prospect, although it was against their rule to let any sign of such grief appear.

It was not the hour of recreation, but the ordinary routine of the establishment was for a little while suspended, partly because it was holiday-time, and partly because an unusual event was coming to pass. One of the parlor boarders, who had been with the sisters since her childhood, first as a boarder and then as a guest, was about to leave them. She was to be fetched away by her mother and her mother's father, who was an English milord, of fabulous wealth and distinction, and, although at present a heretic, exceedingly "well-disposed" towards the Catholic church. It was not often that a gentleman set foot within the precincts of the convent ; and although he would not be allowed to penetrate farther than the parlor, the very fact of his presence sent a thrill of excitement through the house. An English milord, a heretic, the grandfather of "*cette chère Lisa*," whom they were to lose so soon ! No wonder the most placid of the nuns, the most stolid of the lay-sisters, tingled with excitement to the finger-tips !

The girl whose departure from the convent school was thus regretted was known amongst her English friends as Lesley Brooke. French lips, unaccustomed to a name like Lesley, had changed it into Lisa ; but Lesley loved her own name, which was a heritage in her family, and had been handed down to her from her grandmother. She was always glad to hear it from friendly English lips. She was nineteen now, and had stayed with the sisters an unusually long time without exactly knowing why. Family circum-

stances, she was told, had hitherto prevented her mother from taking her to an English home. But now the current of her life was to be changed. She was to leave Paris : she was, she believed, even to leave France. Her mother had written that she was to go to London, and that she (Lady Alice Brooke) would come for her, in company with Lesley's grandfather, Lord Courtleroy, with whom she had been traveling abroad for some time past.

Lesley was overjoyed by the news. She had lately come to suspect something strange, something abnormal, in her own position. She had remained at school when other girls went to their homes : she never had been able to answer questions respecting her relations and their belongings. Her mother, indeed, she knew ; for she sometimes spent a portion of the holidays with Lady Alice at a quiet watering-place in France or Italy. And her mother was all that could be desired. Gentle, refined, beautiful, with a slight shade of melancholy which only made her delicate face more attractive—at least in Lesley's eyes—Lady Alice Brooke gained love and admiration whithersoever she went. But she never spoke of her husband. Lesley had gradually learned that she must not mention his name. In her younger days she had been wont to ask questions about her unknown father. Was he dead ?—was he in another country ?—why had she never seen him ? She soon found that these questions were gently but decidedly checked. Her mother did not decline in so many words to answer them, but she set them aside. Only once, when Lesley was fifteen, and made some timid, wistful reference to the father whom she had never known, did Lady Alice make her a formal answer.

"I will tell you all about your father when you are old enough to hear," she said. "Until then, Lesley, I had rather that you did not talk of him."

Lesley shrank into herself abashed, and never mentioned his name again.

All the same, as she grew older, her fancy played about this unknown father, as the fancy of young girls always plays about a mystery. Had he committed some crime ? had he disgraced himself and his family that his name might not be breathed in Lady Alice's ear ? But she could not believe that her good, beautiful mother would ever have loved and married a wicked man !—such was the

phrase that she, in her girlish innocence and ignorance, used to herself. As to scandal and tittle-tattle, none of it reached the seclusion of her convent-home, or was allowed to sully her fair mind. And it was impossible for her to connect the idea of folly, guilt, or shame with the pure, sweet face of her mother, or the stately pride and dignity of her mother's father, the Earl of Courtleroy. There was evidently a mystery ; but she was sure of one thing, that it was a mystery without disgrace.

And now, as she stood waiting on the stone steps, her face flushed a little, and her eyes filled at the thought that she would now, perhaps, be allowed to hear the story of her parents' lives. For she knew that she was going to leave the convent, and it had been vaguely hinted by Lady Alice in a recent letter that on leaving the convent Lesley must be prepared for a great surprise.

Lesley looked over the silent, sweet-scented garden, and half-sighed, half-smiled, to think that she should leave it so soon, and perhaps for ever. But she was excited rather than sad, and when one of the sisters appeared at the door of the study, or *salle d'étude*, Lesley turned towards her with a quick, eager gesture, which not all the training to which she had been subjected since her childhood would have availed to suppress.

"Oh, sister, tell me, has she come?"

The sister was a tall, spare woman, with a thin face and great dark eyes, with eyelids slightly reddened, as though by long weeping or sleeplessness. It was an austere face, but its severity softened into actual sweetness as she smiled at her pupil's eagerness.

"Gently, my child : why so impetuous?" she said, taking the girl's hand in her own. "Yes, madame has arrived : she is in the parlor, speaking to the Reverend Mother ; and in five minutes you are to go to her."

"Not for five minutes?" said Lesley ; and then, controlling herself, she added, penitently. "I know I am impatient, Sister Rose."

"Yes, dear child : you are impatient : it is in your nature, in your blood," said the sister, looking at her with a sort of pity in her eyes—a pity which Lesley resented, without quite knowing why. "And you are going into a world where you will find many things sadly different from your expectations. If you remember the lessons that we have

tried to read you here—lessons of patience, endurance, resignation to the will of others, and especially to the will of God—you will be happy in spite of sorrow and tribulation."

The young girl trembled : it seemed as if the sister spoke with a purpose, as if she knew of some difficulty, some danger that lay before her. She had been trained to ask no questions, and therefore she kept silence. But her lips trembled, and her beautiful brown eyes filled with tears.

"Come, my dear child," said Sister Rose, taking her by the hand, after a short pause, "I will take you to your mother. She will be ready for you now. May God protect you and guide you in your way through the world!"

And Lesley lowered her head as if she had received a blessing. Sister Rose was a woman whom Lesley honored and revered, and her words, therefore, sank deep, and often recurred to the young girl's mind in days to come.

They went in silence to the door of the parlor. Here Sister Rose relinquished her pupil's hand, tapped three times on one of the panels, and signed to Lesley to open the door. With a trembling hand Lesley obeyed the sign ; and in another moment she was in her mother's arms.

Lady Alice Brooke was a very attractive looking woman. She was tall, slight, and graceful, and although she must have been close upon forty, she certainly had not the appearance of a woman over four or five and thirty. Her complexion was untouched by time : her cheeks were smooth and fair, her blue eyes clear. Her pretty brown hair had perhaps lost a little of the golden tinge of its youth, but it was still soft and abundant. But the reason why people often turned to look at her did not lie in any measure of grace and beauty that she possessed, so much as in an indefinable air of distinction and refinement which seemed to pervade her whole being, and marked her off from the rest of the world as one made of finer clay than others.

Many people resented this demeanor—which was quite unconscious on Lady Alice's part—and thought that it signified pride, haughtiness, coldness of heart ; but in all this they were greatly, if not altogether, mistaken. Lady Alice was not of a cold nature, and she was never willingly haughty ; but in some respects, she was what the world calls proud. She was proud of her ancient lineage ; of the

repute of her family, of the stainlessness of its name. And she had brought up Lesley, as far as she could, in the same old tradition.

Lesley was like her mother, and unlike, too. She had her mother's tall, graceful figure ; but there was much more vivacity in her face than there had ever been in Lady Alice's ; much more warmth and life and color. There was more determination in the lines of her mouth and chin : her brow was broader and fuller, and her eyes were dark brown instead of blue. But the likeness was there, with a diversity of expression and of coloring.

"I thought you were never coming," said Lesley at length, as she clung fondly to her mother. "I could hardly sleep last night for thinking how delightful it would be to go away with you !"

Lady Alice gave a little start, and looked at the girl as if there had been some hidden meaning in her words.

"Go away with me ?" she repeated.

"Yes, mother darling, and be with you always : to look after you and not let grandpapa tire you with long walks and long games of backgammon. I shall be his companion as well as yours, and I shall take care of you both. I have planned ever so many things that I mean to do—especially when we go to Scotland."

"Lesley," said Lady Alice, faintly, "I am tired : let me sit down." And then, as the girl made her seat herself in the one arm-chair that the room contained, and hung over her with affectionate solicitude, she went on, with paling lips : "You never said these things in your letter, child ! I did not know that you were so anxious to come away—with me."

"Oh, mamma, dear, you surely knew it all the time ?" said Lesley, thinking the comment a reproach. "You surely knew how I longed to be with you ? But I would, not *say* much in my letters for fear of making you think I was unhappy ; and I have always been very happy here with the dear sisters and the girls. But I thought you *understood* me, mamma—understood by instinct, as it were," said Lesley, kneeling by her mother's side, and throwing an occasional shy glance into her mother's face.

"I understand perfectly, dear, and I see your unselfish motive. It makes me all the more sorry to disappoint you as I am about to do."

"Oh, mamma! Am I not to leave school, then?"

"Yes, dear, you will leave school."

"And—and—with you?"

"You will come with me, certainly—until to-morrow, darling. But you leave *me* to-morrow, too."

The color began to fade from Lesley's cheeks, as it had already faded from Lady Alice's. The girl felt a great swelling in her throat, and a film seemed to dim the clearness of her sight. But Sister Rose's words came back to her mind with an inspiring thrill which restored her strength. "Patience, endurance, resignation!" Was this the occasion on which she was to show whether these virtues were hers or not? She would not fail in the hour of trial: she would be patient and endure!

"If you will explain, mamma dear," she said, entreatingly, "I will try to do—as you would like."

"My darling! My Lesley! What a help it is to me to see you so brave!" said her mother, putting her arms round the girl's shoulders, and resting her face on the bright young head. "If I could keep you with me! but it will be only for a time, my child, and then—then you *will* come back to me?"

"Come back to you, mamma? As if anything would keep me away! But what is it? where am I to go? what am I to do? Why haven't you told me before?"

She was trembling with excitement. Patience was not one of Lesley's virtues. She felt, with sudden heat of passion, that she could bear any pain rather than this suspense, which her mother's gentle reluctance to give pain inflicted upon her.

"I did not tell you before," said Lady Alice, slowly, "because I was under a promise not to do so. I have been obliged to keep you in the dark about your future for many a long year, Lesley, and the concealment has always weighed upon my mind. You must forgive me, dearest, for this: I did not see the consequence of my promise when I made it first."

"What promise was it, mamma?"

"To let you leave me for a time, my dear: to let you go from me—to let you choose your own life—oh, it seems hard and cruel to me now."

"Tell me," pleaded Lesley, whose heart was by this time beating with painful rapidity, "tell me all—quickly, mamma, and I promise——"

"Promise nothing until you have heard what I have to say," said her mother, drawing back. "I want you to hear the story before you see your grandfather again : that is the reason why I begged the Mother to let me speak to you here, before you left the convent. I have been forced into my present line of action, Lesley : I never took it willingly. You shall judge for yourself if it were likely that I — But I will not excuse myself beforehand. I can tell you all that is necessary for you to know in very few words ; and the rest lies in your hands."

Lady Alice's pale lips quivered as she spoke, but her eyes were dry and filled with a light which was singularly cold and stern. Lesley, kneeling still, looked up into her face, and, fascinated by what she saw there, remained motionless and mute.

"I have not let you speak to me of your father," Lady Alice began, "because I did not know how to answer your questions truthfully. But now I must speak of him. You have thought of him sometimes ? "

"Yes."

"And you have thought him dead ? "

"I thought so—yes."

"But he is not dead," said Lady Alice, bitterly. "To my exceeding misfortune—and yours also—your father, Lesley, is alive."



## CHAPTER II.

## LADY ALICE'S STORY.

THE girl shrank back a little, but she did not remove her eyes from her mother's face. A great dread, however, had entered into them. A hot color leaped into her cheeks. Scarcely did she yet know what she dreaded; it was something intangible, too awful to be uttered—the terror of disgrace.

But Lady Alice saw the look and interpreted it aright. "No, my darling," she said, "it is not *that*. It is nothing to be ashamed of—*exactly*. I do not accuse your father of any crime—unless it be a crime to have married a woman that he did not love, and to whom he was not suited, and to have been cruel—yes, cruel—to her and to her child."

And then she burst into tears.

"Mamma, dear mamma!" said Lesley, clasping her and sobbing out of sympathy, "it was a crime—worse than a crime—to be cruel to *you*."

Lady Alice sobbed helplessly for a few minutes. Then she commanded herself by a great and visible effort and dried her eyes.

"It is weak to give way before you, *child*," she said, sadly. "But I cannot tell you how much I have dreaded this moment—the moment when I must tell you of the great error of my life."

"Don't tell me, mamma. I would rather hear nothing that you did not want me to know."

"But I must tell you, Lesley. It is in my bargain with my husband that I should tell you. If I say nothing he will tell you *his* side—and perhaps that would be worse."

Lesley kissed her mother's delicate hand. "Then—if you *must* tell me—I should be glad to hear it all now," she said, in a shaking voice. "Nothing seems so bad as to know half a story—or only to guess a part——"

"Ah, you have wondered why I told you nothing of your father?"

"I could not help wondering, mamma."

"Poor child! Well, whatever it costs me I will tell you all my story now. Listen carefully, darling: I do not want to have to tell it twice."

She pressed her handkerchief to her lips as if to prevent them from trembling, and then turning her eyes to another part of the room so that they need not rest upon her daughter's face Lady Alice began her story.

"My tale is a tale of folly, not of crime," she said. "You must remember, Lesley, that I was a motherless girl, brought up in a lonely Scotch house in a very haphazard way. My dear father loved me tenderly, but he was away from home for the greater part of the year; and he understood little of a girl's nature or a girl's requirements. When I was sixteen he allowed me to dismiss my governess, and to live as I liked. I was romantic and dreamy; I spent a great deal of time in the library, and he thought that there at least I was safe. He would have been more careful of me, as he said afterwards, if I had wanted to roam over the moors and fields, to fish or shoot as many modern women do. I can only say that I think I should have been far safer on the hillside or the moor than I was in the lonely recesses of that library, pouring over musty volumes of chivalry and romance.

"My only change was a few weeks in London with friends, during the season. Here, young as I was, I was thrown into a whirl of gaiety; but the society that I met was of the best sort, and I welcomed it as a pleasant relaxation. I saw the pleasant side of everything. You see I was very young. I went to the most charming parties; I was well introduced: I think I may say that I was admired. My first season was almost the happiest—certainly the most joyous—period of my life. But it was still a time of unreality, Lesley: the glitter and glamour of that glimpse of London society was as unreal as my dreams of love and beauty and nobleness in the old library at home. I lacked a mother's guiding hand, my child, and a mother's tender voice to tell me what was false and what was true."

Involuntarily Lesley drew closer than ever to her mother.

The ring of pain in Lady Alice's voice saddened and even affrighted her. It suggested a passionate yearning, an anxiety of love, which almost overwhelmed her. It is always alarming to a young and simple nature to be brought

suddenly into contact with a very strong emotion, either of anguish, love, or joy.

"I suffered for my loss," Lady Alice went on; after a short pause. "But at first without knowing that I suffered. There comes a time in every woman's life, Lesley, when she is in need of help and counsel, when, in fact, she is in danger. As soon as a woman loves, she stands on the brink of a precipice."

"I thought," murmured Lesley, "that love was the most beautiful thing in the world?"

"Is that what the nuns have taught you?" asked her mother, with a keen glance at the girl's flushing cheek. "Well, in one sense it is true. Love is a beautiful thing to look at—an angel to outward show—with the heart, too often, of a fiend; and it is he who leads us to that precipice of which I spoke—the precipice of disillusion and despair."

To Lesley these words were as blasphemy, for they contradicted the whole spirit of the teaching which she had received. But she did not dare to contradict her mother's opinions. She looked down, and reflected dumbly that her mother knew more about the subject than she could possibly do. The good Sisters had talked to her about heavenly love; she had made no fine distinctions in her mind as to the kind of love they meant—possibly there were two kinds. And while she was considering this knotty point, her mother began to speak again.

"I was between eighteen and nineteen," said Lady Alice, "scarcely as old as you are now, when a new interest came into my life. My father gave permission to a young literary man to examine our archives, which contained much of historical value. He never thought of cautioning me to leave the library to Mr. Brooke's sole occupation. I was accustomed to spend much of my time there: and the stranger—Mr. Brooke—must have heard this fact from the servants, for he begged that he might not disturb me, and that I would frequent the library as usual. After a little hesitation, I began to do so. My father was in London, and my only chaperon was an old lady who was too infirm to be of much use. Before long, I began to help Mr. Brooke in his researches and inquiries. He was writing a book on the great Scottish families of that part of the country, and the subject interested me. Need I tell you

what followed, Lesley? Need I explain to you the heedless selfish folly of that time? I forgot my duty to my father, my duty to myself. I fancied I loved this man, and I promised to marry him."

There was a light of interest in Lesley's eyes. She did not altogether understand her mother's tone. It sounded as though Lady Alice condemned lovers and all their ways, and such condemnation puzzled the girl, in spite of her convent breeding. During the last few months she had been allowed a much wider range of literature than was usual in the Sisters' domain; her mother had requested that she should be supplied with certain volumes of history, fiction, and poetry, that had considerably enlarged Lesley's views of life; and yet Lady Alice's words seemed to contradict all that the girl had previously heard or read of love. The mother read the unspoken question in Lesley's eyes, and answered it in a somewhat modified tone.

"My dear, I do not mean that I think it wrong to love. So long as the world lasts I suppose people will love—and be miserable. It is right enough, if it is opposed by no other law. But in my case, I was wrong from beginning to end. I knew that my father would never give his permission to my marriage with Mr. Brooke; and, in my youthful folly, I thought that my best plan was to take my own way. I married Mr. Brooke in private, and then I went away with him to London. And it was not long, Lesley, before I rued my disobedience and my deceit. It was a great mistake."

"But mamma, why were you so sure that grandpapa would not give his consent?"

Lady Alice opened her gentle eyes with a look of profound astonishment.

"Darling, don't you see? Mr. Brooke was—nobody."

"But if you loved him——"

"No, Lesley, your grandfather would never have heard of such a marriage. He had his own plans for me. My dear, I am not saying a word against your father in saying this. I am only telling you the fact—that he was what is often called a self-made, self-educated man, who could not possibly be styled my equal in the eyes of society. His father had been a small tradesman in Devonshire. The son being clever and—and—handsome, made his way a little

in the world. He became a journalist : he wrote for magazines and newspapers and reviews : he was what is called a literary hack. He had no certain prospects, no certain income, when he married me. I think," said Lady Alice, with a sort of cold scorn, which was intensified by the very softness of her tones, "that he could not have done a more unjustifiable thing than persuade a girl in my position to marry him."

Lesley felt a slight diminution of sympathy with her mother. Perhaps Lady Alice was conscious of some change in her face, for she added hastily.

"Don't misjudge me, Lesley. If there had been between us the strong and tender love of which women too often dream, poverty might perhaps have been forgotten. It sounds terribly worldly to draw attention to the fact that poverty is apt to kill a love which was not very strong at the beginning. But the fact was that neither Caspar Brooke nor I knew our own minds. He was three-and-twenty and I was eighteen. We married in haste, and we certainly repented very much at leisure."

"Was he not—kind?" asked Lesley, timidly.

"Kind?" said her mother, with a sigh. "Oh, yes, perhaps he was kind—at first. Until he was tired of me, or I was tired of him. I don't know on which side the disillusion was felt first. Think where I came from—from the dear old Castle, the moors, the lochs, the free fresh air of Scotland, to a dreary lodging of two little rooms in a dingy street, where I had to cut and contrive and economize to make ends meet. I was an ignorant girl, and I could not do it. I got into debt, and my husband was angry with me. Why should I tell you the petty, sordid details of my life? I soon found out that I was miserable and that he was miserable too."

Lesley listened breathlessly with hidden face. The story was full of humiliation for her. It seemed like a desecration of all that she had hitherto held dear.

"My father and my friends would not forgive me," Lady Alice went on. "In our direst straits of poverty, I am glad to say that I never appealed to them. We struggled on together—your father and I—until you were four years old. Then a change came—a change which made it impossible for me to bear the misery of my life. Your father——"

She came to a sudden stop, and sat with eyes fixed on the opposite wall, a curious expression of mingled desolation and contempt upon her cold, clear-cut face. For some reason or other Lesley felt afraid to hear what her mother had to say.

"Mamma, don't tell me ! Don't look like that," she cried. "I can't bear to hear it ! Why need you tell me any more ?"

"Because," said her mother, slowly, "because your father exacts this sacrifice from me : that I should tell you—*you*, my daughter—the reason why I left him. I promised that I would do so, and I will keep my promise. The thing that hurts me most, Lesley, is to think that I may be injuring you—staining your innocence—darkening your youth—by telling you what I have to tell. At your age, I would rather that you knew nothing of life but its brighter side—nothing of love but what was fair and sweet. But it is the punishment of my first false step that I should bring sorrow upon my child. Lesley, in years to come remember that I have warned you to be honest and true, unless you would make those miserable whom you love best. If I had never deceived my father, my husband would never perhaps have deceived me ; and I should not have to tell my child that the last person in the world whom she must trust is her father."

There was a little silence, and then she continued in a strained and unnatural tone.

"There was a woman—another woman—whom he loved. That is all."

Lesley shivered and hid her face. To her mind, young and innocent as it was, the fact which her mother stated seemed like an indelible stain. She hardly dared as yet think what it meant. And, after a long pause, Lady Alice went on quietly—

"I do not want to exaggerate. I do not believe that he meant to leave me—even to be untrue to me. I could not speak to you of him if I thought him so black-hearted, so treacherous. I mean simply this—take the fact as I state it, and inquire no further ; I found that my husband cared for some one else more than he cared for me. My resolution was taken at once : I packed up my things, left his house, and threw myself at my father's feet. He was good to me and forgave me, and since then. . . I have never entered my husband's house again."

"He must have been wicked—wicked!" said Lesley, in a strangled voice.

"No, he was not wicked. Let me do him so much justice. He was upright on the whole, I believe. He never meant to give me cause for complaint. But I had reason to believe that another woman suited him better than I did . . . and it was only fair to leave him."

"But did he—could he—marry her? I mean—"

"My poor Lesley, you are very ignorant," said Lady Alice, smiling a wan smile, and touching the girl's cheek lightly with her hand. "How could he marry another woman when I was alive? Your father and I separated on account of what is called incompatibility of temper. The question of the person whom he apparently preferred to me never arose between us."

"Then, is it not possible, mamma, that you may have been mistaken?" said Lesley, impetuously.

Lady Alice shook her head. "Quite impossible, Lesley. I accuse your father of nothing. I only mean that another woman—one of his friends—would have suited him better than I, and that he knew it. I have no cause for complaint against him. And I would not have told you *this*, had I not felt it a duty to put in the strongest possible light my reasons for leaving him, so that a day may never come when you turn round upon me and blame me—as others have done—for fickleness, for ill-temper, for impatience with my husband; because now you know—as no one else knows—the whole truth."

"But I should never blame you, mamma."

"I do not know. I know this—that your father is a man who can persuade and argue and represent his conduct in any light that suits his purpose. He is a very eloquent—a very plausible man. He will try to win you over to his side."

"But I shall never see him."

"Yes, Lesley, you will. You are going to him to-morrow."

"I will not—I will not"—said the girl, springing from her knees, and involuntarily clenching her right hand. "I will not speak to him—if he treated my darling mother so shamefully he must be bad, and I will not acknowledge any relationship to him."

A look of apprehension showed itself in Lady Alice's eyes.

"Darling," she said, "you must not let your generous love for me run away with your judgment. I am bound, and you must be bound with me. Listen, when your father found that I had left him he was exceedingly angry. He came to your grandfather's house, he clamored to see me, he attempted to justify himself—oh, I cannot tell you the misery that I went through. At last I consented to see him. He behaved like a madman. He swore that he would have me back—tyrant that he was!"

"Mamma—perhaps he cared?"

"Cared! He cared for his reputation," said Lady Alice growing rather white about the lips. "For nothing else! Not for me, Lesley! When his violence had expended itself we came to terms. He agreed to let me live where I liked on condition that when you were eight years old you were sent to school, and saw me only during the holidays——"

"But why?"

"He said that he dreaded my influence on your mind," said Lady Alice. "That you should be brought up at a good school was the first thing. Secondly, that when you were nineteen you should spend a year with him, and then a year with me; and that when you were twenty-one you should choose for yourself with which of the two you preferred to cast in your lot."

"Oh, mamma, I cannot go to him now."

"You must go, Lesley. I am bound, and you are bound by my promise. Only for a year, my darling. Then you can come back to me for ever. I stipulated that I should see you first, and say to you what I chose."

"But cannot I wait a little while?"

"Twenty-four hours, Lesley; that is all. You go to your father to-morrow."



## CHAPTER III.

## MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE conversation between Lesley and her mother occupied a considerable time, and the sun was sinking westward when at last the two ladies left the Convent. Lesley's adieux had been made before Lady Alice's arrival, and the only persons whom she saw, therefore, after the long interview with her mother, were the Mother Superior, and the Sister who had summoned her to the parlor.

While Lady Alice and the Reverend Mother exchanged a few last words, Lesley drew close to Sister Rose's side, and laid her hand on the serge-covered arm.

"You were right," she said. "Sister, I see already that I shall need patience and endurance where I am going."

"Gentleness and love, also," said the Sister. Then, as if in answer to an indefinable change in Lesley's lips and eyes, she added gently, "We are told that peacemakers are blessed."

"I could not make peace——" Lesley began, hastily, and then she stopped short, confused, not knowing how much Sister Rose had heard of her mother's story. But if Sister Rose were ignorant of it, her next words were singularly appropriate. For she said, in a low tone—

"Peace is better than war: forgiveness better than hatred. Dear child, it may be in your hands to reconcile those who have been long divided. Do your best."

Lesley had no time to reply.

It was a long drive from the Convent of the Annonciades to the hotel where Lord Courtleroy and Lady Alice were staying. The mother and daughter spoke little; each seemed wrapped in her own reflections. There were a hundred questions which Lesley was longing to ask; but she did not like to disturb her mother's silence. Dusk had fallen before their destination was reached; and Lesley's thoughts were diverted a little from their sad bewilderment by what was to her the novel sight of Paris by gaslight,

and the ever-flowing, opposing currents of human beings that filled the streets. Hitherto, when she had left the Sisters for her holidays, her mother had wisely kept her within certain bounds : she had not gone out of doors after dark, she had not seen anything but the quieter sides of life. But now all seemed to be changed. Her mother mentioned the name of the best hotel in Paris as their destination : she said a few words about shopping, dresses, and jewellery, which made Lesley's heart beat faster, in spite of a conviction that it was very mean and base to feel any joy in such trivial matters. Especially under present circumstances. But she was young and full of life, and there certainly was some excitement in the prospect before her.

"I shall not need much where I am going, shall I?" she hazarded timidly.

"Perhaps not, but you must not be in any difficulty. There is not time to do a great deal, but you can be fitted and have some dresses sent after you, and I can choose your hats. And a fur-lined cloak for travelling—you will want that. We must do what we can in the time. It is not likely that your father sees much society."

"It will be very lonely," said Lesley, with a little gasp.

"My poor child! I am afraid it will. I can tell some friends of mine to call on you; but I don't know whether they will be admitted."

"Where is—the house?" Lesley asked. She did not like to say "my father's house."

"In Upper Woburn Place, Bloomsbury. I believe it is near Euston Square, or some such neighborhood."

"Then it is not where *you* lived, mamma?"

"No, dear. We lived further West, in a street near Portman Square. I believe that Mr. Brooke finds Bloomsbury a convenient district for the kind of work that he has to do."

She spoke very formally of her husband; but Lesley began to notice an under-current of resentment, of something like contempt, in her voice when she spoke of him. Lady Alice tried in vain to simulate an indifference which she did not feel, and the very effort roughened her voice and sharpened her accent in a way of which she was unconscious. The effect on a young girl, who had not seen much of human emotion, was to induce a passing

doubt of her mother's judgment, and a transient wonder as to whether her father had always been so much in the wrong. The sensation was but momentary, for Lesley was devotedly attached to her mother, and could not believe her to be mistaken. And, while she was repenting of her hasty injustice, the carriage stopped between the white globes of electric light that fronted a great hotel, and Lesley was obliged to give her attention to the things around her rather than to her own thoughts and feelings.

A waiter conducted the mother and daughter up one flight of stairs and consigned them to the care of a chambermaid. The chambermaid led them to the door of a suite of rooms, where they were met by Dayman, Lady Alice's own woman, whose stolid face relaxed into a smile of pleasure at the sight of Lesley.

"Take Miss Brooke to her own room and see that she is made nice for dinner," said her mistress. "His Lordship has ordered dinner in our own rooms, I suppose?"

"Yes, my lady. Covers for four—Captain Duchesne is here."

"Oh," said Lady Alice, with an accent of faint surprise, "oh—well—Lesley, dear, we must not be late."

To Lesley it seemed hardly worth while to unpack her boxes and dress herself for that one evening in the soft embroidered white muslin which had hitherto served for her best Sunday frock. But Mrs. Dayman insisted on a careful toilette, and was well satisfied with the result.

"There, Miss Lesley," she said, "you have just your mamma's look—a sort of finished look, as if you were perfect outside and in!"

Lesley laughed. "That compliment might be taken in two ways, Dayman," she said, as she turned to meet her mother at the door. And in a few minutes she was standing in the gay little French *salon*, where the earl was conversing with a much younger man in a glare of waxlights.

Lord Courtleroy was a stately-looking man, with perfectly show-white hair and beard, an upright carriage, and bright, piercing, blue eyes. A striking man in appearance, and of exceedingly well-marked characteristics. The family pride for which he had long been noted seemed to show itself in his bearing and in every feature as he greeted his granddaughter, and yet it was softened by a touch of personal affection with which family pride had nothing

whatever to do. For Lord Courtleroy's feelings towards Lesley were mixed. He saw in her the child of a man whose very name he detested, who stood as a type to him of all that was hateful in the bourgeois class. But he also saw in her his own granddaughter, "poor Alice's girl," whom fate had used so unkindly in giving her Caspar Brooke for a father. The earl had next to no personal knowledge of Caspar Brooke. They had not met since the one sad and stormy interview which they had held together when Lady Alice had left her husband's house. And Lord Courtleroy was wont to declare that he did not wish to know anything more of Mr. Brooke. That he was a Radical journalist, and that he had treated a daughter of the Courtleroy's with shameful unkindness and neglect, was quite enough for the earl. And his manner to Lesley varied a little according as his sense of her affinity with his own family or his remembrance of her kinship with Mr. Brooke was uppermost.

Lesley was too simply filial in disposition to resent or even to remark on his changes of mood. She admired her grandfather immensely, and was pleased to hear him comment on her growth and development since she saw him last. And then the visitor was introduced to her; and to Lesley's interest and surprise she saw that he was young.

Young men were an unknown quantity to Lesley. She could not remember that she had ever spoken to a man so young and so good-looking before! Captain Henry Duchesne was tall, well-made, well-dressed: he was very dark in complexion, and had a rather heavy jaw; but his dark eyes were pleasant and honest, and he had a very attractive smile. The length of his moustache was almost the first thing that struck Lesley: it seemed to her so abnormally lengthy, with such very stiffly waxed ends, that she could scarcely avert her eyes from them. She was not able to tell, save from instinct, whether a man were well or ill-dressed, but she felt sure that Captain Duchesne's air of smartness was due to the perfection of every detail of his attire. She liked his manner: it was easy, well-bred, and unassuming; and she felt glad that he was present. For after the communication made to her by her mother, the evening might have proved an occasion of embarrassment. It was a relief to talk to some one for a little while who did not know her present circumstances and position.

Lady Alice watched the two young people with a little dawning trouble in her sad eyes. She had known and liked Harry Duchesne since his childhood, and she had not been free from certain hopes and visions of his future, which affected Lesley also, but she thought that her father's invitation had been premature. Especially when she heard Captain Duchesne say to the girl in the course of the evening—

"Are you going to London to-morrow?"

"Yes, I believe so," said Lesley, looking down.

"And you will be in town during the winter, I hope?"

Lady Alice thought it well to interpose.

"My daughter will not be staying with me. She goes to a relation's house for a few months, and will lead a very quiet life indeed. When she comes back to Courtleroy it will be time enough for her to commence a round of gaieties." This with a smile; but, as Henry Duchesne knew well enough, with Lady Alice a smile sometimes covered a very serious purpose. His quick perceptions showed him that he was not wanted to call on Miss Brooke during her stay in London, and he adroitly changed the subject.

"Unfashionable relations, I suppose," he said to himself, reflecting on the matter at a later hour of the evening. "Upon my word I shouldn't have thought that Lady Alice was so worldly-minded! She certainly didn't want me to know where Miss Brooke was going. To some relation of that disreputable father of hers, I should fancy. Poor girl!"

For, like many other persons in London society, Captain Duchesne knew only the name and nothing of the character of the man whom Lady Alice had married and left. It was vaguely supposed that he was not a very respectable character, and that no woman of spirit would have submitted to live with him any longer. Lady Alice's reputation stood so high that it could not be supposed that any one except her husband was in fault. Brooke is not an uncommon name. In certain circles the name of Caspar Brooke was known well enough; but was not often identified with the man who had run away with an earl's daughter. He had other claims to repute, but in a world to which Lady Alice had not the right of entry.

When Harry Duchesne had departed Lady Alice went with Lesley to her bedroom. Mother and daughter sat

down together, clasping each other's hands, and looking wistfully from time to time into each other's faces, but saying very little. The wish to ask questions faded out of Lesley's mind. She could not ask more than her mother chose to tell her.

But Lady Alice thought that she had already said too much, and she restrained her tongue. It was after a long and pregnant silence that she murmured—

"Lesley, my child, I want you to promise me something."

"Oh, yes, mamma!"

"I feel like one who is sending a lamb forth into the midst of wolves. Not that Mr. Brooke is a wolf—exactly," said Lady Alice, with a forced laugh, "but I mean that you are young and—and—unsophisticated, and that there may be a mixture of people at his house."

Lesley was silent; she did not quite know what "a mixture of people" would be like.

"I am so afraid for you, darling," said her mother, pleadingly. "Afraid lest you should be drawn into relationships and connections that you might afterwards regret. Do you understand me? Will you promise me to make no vows of any sort while you are away from me? Only for one year, my child—promise me for the year."

"I don't think I quite understand you, mamma."

"Must I put it so plainly? I mean this, Lesley. Don't engage yourself to be married while you are in your father's house."

"Oh, that is easily promised!" said Lesley, with a smile of frank amusement and relief.

"It may not be so easy to carry out as you think. Give me your word, darling. You promise not to form any engagement of marriage for a year? You promise me that?"

"Oh, yes, mamma, I promise," said the girl, so lightly that Lady Alice almost felt that she had done an unwarrantable thing in exacting a promise only half understood. But she swallowed her rising qualms, and went on, as if exculpating herself—

"It is a safeguard. I do not ask you to marry only a man that I approve—I simply ask you to wait until I can help you with my advice. It will be no loss to you in any way. You are too young to think of these things yet;

but it is on the young that unscrupulous persons love to prey—and therefore I give you a warning.”

“I am quite sure that I shall not need it,” said Lesley, confidently; “and if I did, I could write and ask your advice——”

“No, no! Oh, how could I forget to tell you? You are not to write to me while you are in your father’s house.”

“Oh, mamma, that is cruel.”

“It is *his* doing, not mine. Intercede with *him*, if you like. That was one of the conditions—that for this one year you should have no intercourse with me. And for the next year you will have no intercourse with him. And after that, you may choose for yourself.”

But this deprivation of correspondence affected Lesley more powerfully than even the prospect of separation—to which she was used already. She threw herself into her mother’s arms and wept bitterly for a few moments. Then it occurred to her that she was acting neither thoughtfully nor courageously, and that her grief would only grieve her mother, and could remedy nothing. So she sat up and dried her eyes, and tried to respond cheerfully when Lady Alice spoke a few soothing words. But in the whole course of her short life poor Lesley had never been so miserable as she was that night.

The bustle of preparation which had to be gone through next day prevented her, however, from thinking too much about her troubles. She and Lady Alice, with the faithful Dayman, were to leave Paris late in the afternoon; and the morning was spent in hurried excursions to shops, interviews with milliners and dressmakers, eager discussions on color, shape, and fitness. Lesley was glad to see that she was not to be sent to London with anything over-fine in the way of clothes. The gowns chosen were extremely simple, but in good taste; and the *modiste* promised that they should be sent after the young lady in the course of a very few days. There was some argument as to whether Lesley would require a ball dress, or dinner dresses. Lady Alice thought not. But, although nothing that could actually be called a ball-dress was ordered, there were one or two frocks of lovely shimmering hue and delightfully soft texture which would serve for any such festivity.

"Though in *my* day," said Lady Alice, smiling, "we did not go to balls in Bloomsbury. But, of course, I don't know what society Mr. Brooke sees now."

Lesley was conscious of the sarcasm.

The earl remained in Paris, while Lady Alice went with her daughter from Havre to Southampton, and thence to London. Dayman travelled with them; and a supplementary escort appeared in the person of Captain Duchesne, who "happened to be travelling that way." Lady Alice was not displeased to see him, although she had a guilty sense of stealing a march upon her husband in providing Lesley with a standard of youthful good-breeding and good-looks. It might tend to preserve her from forming any silly attachment in her father's circle, Lady Alice thought. As a matter of fact, she was singularly ignorant of what that circle might comprise. She had left him before his more prosperous days began to dawn, and she continued therefore to picture him to herself as the struggling journalist in murky lodgings—"the melancholy literary man" who smoked strong tobacco far into the night, and talked of things in which she had no interest at all. If matters were changed with Caspar Brooke since then, Lady Alice did not know it.

She had ascertained that Mr. Brooke's sister was living in his house, and that she was capable of acting in some sort as Lesley's chaperon. Then, a connection of the earl's was rector of a neighboring church close to Upper Woburn Place—and he had promised to take Miss Brooke under his especial pastoral care—although, as he mildly insinuated, he was not in the habit of visiting at Number Fifty. And with these recommendations and assurances, Lady Alice was forced to be content.

She parted from her daughter at Waterloo Station. It did not seem possible to her to drive up to her husband's house in a cab, and drive away again. She committed her, therefore, to the care of Dayman, and put the girl and her maid into a four-wheeler, with Lesley's luggage on the top. Then she established herself in the ladies' waiting-room, until such time as Dayman should return.

With beating heart and flushing cheek Lesley drove through the rapidly-darkening streets to her father's house. She was terribly nervous at the prospect of meeting him.



And, even after the history that she had learnt from her mother, she felt that she had not the slightest notion as to what manner of man Caspar Brooke might turn out to be.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE MANNER OF MAN.

ON the day preceding Lesley Brooke's arrival in London, a tall, broad-shouldered man was walking along Southampton Row. He was a big man—a man whom people turned to look at—a distinctly noticeable man. He was considerably taller and broader than the average of his fellows: he was wide-chested and muscular, though without any inclination to stoutness; and he had a handsome, sunburned face, with a short brown beard and deep-set, dark-brown eyes. His hair was not cut quite to the conventional shortness, perhaps: there was a lock that would fall in an unruly manner across the broad brow with an obstinacy no hairdresser could subvert. But, in all other respects, he was very much as other men: he dressed well, if rather carelessly, and presented to the world a somewhat imposing personality. He did not wear gloves, and he had no flower at his button-hole; but the respectability of his silk hat and well-made coat was unimpeachable, and he had all the air of easy command which is so characteristic of the well-bred Englishman. The slight roughness about him was as inseparable from his build and his character as it is to the best-groomed and best-bred staghound or mastiff of the highest race.

Southampton Row, as is well known, leads into Russell Square. In fact the straight line of the Row merges imperceptibly into one side of the Square, whence it continues under the name of Woburn Place, the East side of Tavistock Square, Upper Woburn Place, and Euston Square, losing itself at last in the Northern wilderness of the crowded Euston Road. It was at a house which he passed in his straight course from Holburn towards St. Pancras that this very tall and strong-looking gentleman stopped, at about five o'clock on a September afternoon.

He stood on the steps for a moment, and looked up and down the house doubtfully, as if seeking for signs of life

from within. A great many people were still out of town, and he was uncertain whether the occupants of this house were at home or not. The place had evidently been in the hands of painters and cleaners since he saw it last : the stone-work was scrupulously white, the wood-work was painted a delicate green. The visitor lifted his well-defined eyebrows at the lightness of the color, as he turned to the door and rang the bell. It was easy to see that he was an observant man, upon whose eyes very few things were lost.

"Mrs. Romaine in?" he asked the trim maid who appeared in answer to his ring. He noticed that she was a new maid.

"Yes, sir. What name shall I say, please, sir?"

"Mr. Brooke."

The girl looked intelligent, as if she had heard the name before. And Mr. Brooke, following her upstairs to the drawing-room, reflected on the quickness with which servants make themselves acquainted with their masters' and mistresses' affairs, and the disadvantages of a civilization in which you were at the mercy of your servants' tongues.

These reflections had no bearing on his own circumstances : they proceeded entirely from Mr. Brooke's habit of taking general views, and making large applications of small things.

The day was cloudy, and, although it was only five o'clock, the streets were growing dark. The weather was chilly, moreover, and the wind blew from the East. It was a pleasant change to enter Mrs. Romaine's drawing-room, which was full of soft light from a glowing little fire, full of the scent of roses and the lovely tints of Indian embroideries, Italian tapestries, dead gold-leaf backgrounds, and china that was beautiful as well as rare. Lady Alice Brooke, in her narrow isolation from the world, would not have believed that so charming a room could be found east of Great Portland Street. In which opinion she was very much mistaken ; for her belief that in "society" and society's haunts alone could one find taste, culture, and beauty, led her to ignore the vast number of intellectual and artistic folk who still sojourn in the dim squares of Bloomsbury and Regent's Park. Sooth to say Lady Alice knew absolutely nothing of the worlds of intellect and art, save by means of an occasional article in the

magazines, or a stroll through the large picture galleries of London during the season. She was a good woman in her way, and—also in her way—a clever one; but she had been brought up in another atmosphere from that which her husband loved, elevated in a totally different school, and she was not of a nature to adapt herself to what she did not thoroughly understand.

Mrs. Romaine knew well enough that she was quite as well able to hold her own in the fashionable world if once she obtained an entrance to it as any Lady Alice or Lady Anybody of her acquaintance. But then the difficulty of entering it was very great. She had not sufficient fortune to vie with women who every year spent hundreds on their dress and on their dinner. She was handsome, but she was middle-aged. She had few friends of sufficient distinction to push her forward. And she was a wise woman. She thought it better to live where she enjoyed a good deal of popularity and consideration; where she could entertain in a modest way, where her husband had been well known, and she could glow with the reflected light that came to her from his shining abilities. These reasons were patent to the world: she really made no secret of them. But there was another reason, not quite so patent to the world, for her living quietly in Russell Square, and this reason she kept strictly to herself.

Mrs. Romaine had been a widow for three years. Her husband had been a very learned man—Professor of numerous Oriental languages at University College for some years, afterwards a Judge in Calcutta; and as he had always lived in the West Central district during his Professorate, Mrs. Romaine declared that she loved it and could live nowhere else. The house in Russell Square was only partly hers. Her brother rented some of the rooms (shared the house with her, as Mrs. Romaine vaguely phrased it), and lightened the expense. But the two drawing-rooms, opening out of one another, were entirely at Mrs. Romaine's disposal, and she was generally to be found there between four and five o'clock in an afternoon—a fact of which it is to be presumed that Mr. Brooke was aware.

"So you have come back to town?" she said, rising to meet him, and extending both hands with a pretty air of appropriative friendship.

"Yes; but I hardly expected to find you here so early."

Mrs. Romaine shrugged her shoulders a little.

"I found the country very dull," she said. "And you?"

"Oh, I went to Norway. I was well enough off. I rather enjoyed myself. Perhaps I required a little bracing up for the task that lies before me." He laughed as he spoke.

Mrs. Romaine paused for a moment in her task of pouring out the tea.

"You are resolved, then, to assume that responsibility?" she said, in a low voice.

"My dear Rosalind! it's in the bond," answered Caspar Brooke, very coolly.

He took the cup from her hand, stirred its contents, and proceeded to drink them in a leisurely manner, glancing at his hostess meanwhile, with a quiet smile.

Mrs. Romaine's dark eyes dropped before that glance. There was an inscrutable look upon her face, but it was a look that would have told another woman that Mrs. Romaine was disappointed by the news which she had just heard. Caspar Brooke, being a man, saw nothing.

"I am sorry," Mrs. Romaine said presently, with an assumption of great candor. "I am afraid you will have an uncomfortable time."

"Oh, no," he answered, with indifference. "I shall not be uncomfortable, because it will not affect me in the least. When I spoke of bracing myself for the task, I was in jest." Mrs. Romaine did not believe this statement. "I shall go my own way whether the girl is in the house or not."

"Why, then, did you insist on this arrangement?"

"It is only right to give the girl a chance," said Mr. Brooke. "If she has any grit in her the next twelve months will bring it out. Besides, it is simple justice. She ought to see and judge for herself. If she decides—as her mother did—that I am an ogre, she can go back to her aristocratic friends in the North. I shall not try to keep her." There was the suspicion of a grim sneer on his face as he spoke.

"Do you know what she is like?"

"Yes: I saw her one day in Paris. She did not know, of course, that I was watching her. She is like her mother."

The tone was unpromising. But perhaps it would have been as well if Rosalind Romaine had not murmured so pityingly—

"My poor friend! What you have suffered—and oh, what you *will* suffer!"

Brooke looked at her in silence, and his eyes softened. Mrs. Romaine seemed to him at that moment the incarnation of all that was sweet and womanly. She was slender, pale, graceful: she had velvety dark eyes and picturesque curling hair, cut short like a Florentine boy's. Her dress was harmonious in color and design; her attitude was charming, her voice most musical. It crossed Mr. Brooke's mind, as it had crossed his mind before, that he might have been very happy if Providence had sent him a wife like Rosalind Romaine.

"I shall not suffer," he said, after a little silence, "because I will not suffer. My daughter will live for a year in my house, but she will not trouble my peace, I can assure you. She will go her own way, and I shall go mine."

"I am afraid that she will not be so passive as you think," said Mrs. Romaine, with some hesitation. "She has been brought up in a very different school from any that you would recommend. A girl fresh from a French convent is not an easy person to deal with. Whatever may be the advantages of these convents, there are certain virtues which are not inculcated in them."

"Such as——"

"Truth and honesty, Caspar, my friend. Your daughter's accomplishments will not include candor, I fear."

Mr. Brooke was silent for a moment, his face expressing more concern than he knew. Mrs. Romaine watched him furtively.

"It may be so," he said at last in a rather heavy tone, "but it can't be helped. I had no hand in choosing a school for her, Rosalind"—his voice took a pleading tone—"you will do your best for her? You will be her friend in spite of defects in her training?"

"I will do anything that I can. But you will forgive me for saying, Caspar, that it is hard for me to forget that she is the daughter of the woman who—practically—wrecked your life."

Brooke's face grew hard again. He uttered a short laugh, which had not a very agreeable sound.

"Wrecked my life!" he repeated, disdainfully. "Excuse me, Rosalind. No woman ever had the power of wrecking my life. Indeed, I have been far more fortunate and prosperous since Lady Alice chose to leave me than before."

Mrs. Romaine said nothing. She was an adept in the art of insinuating by a look, a turn of the head, a gesture, what she wished to convey. At this moment she indicated very clearly, though without speaking a word, that she sympathized deeply with her friend, Caspar Brooke, and was exceedingly indignant at the way in which he had been treated.

Perhaps Mr. Brooke found the atmosphere enervating, for with a half-smile and shake of the head, he rose up to go. Mrs. Romaine rose also.

"She comes to-morrow evening," he said, before he took his leave.

"To-morrow evening? You will be out!"

"No, it is Wednesday: I can manage an evening at home. Perhaps you will kindly look in on Thursday afternoon?"

And this Mrs. Romaine undertook to do.

Caspar Brooke continued his walk along the Eastern side of Russell Square and Woburn Place. His quick observant eyes took note of every incident in his way, of every man, woman, and child within their range of vision. He stopped once to rate a cabman, not too mildly, for beating an over-worked horse—took down his number, and threatened to prosecute him for cruelty to animals. A ragged boy who asked him for money was brought to a standstill by some keenly-worded questions respecting his home, his name, his father's occupation, and the school which he attended. Of these Mr. Brooke also made a note, much to the boy's dismay; but consolation followed in the shape of a shilling, although the donor muttered a malediction on his own folly as he turned away. His last actions, before reaching his own house in Upper Woburn Place, were—first to ring the area-bell for a dog that was waiting at another man's gate (an office which the charitable are often called upon to perform in the streets of London for dogs and cats alike), and then to pick up a bony black kitten and take it on his arm to his own door, where he delivered it to a servant, with injunctions to feed and

comfort the starveling. From which facts it may be seen that Mr. Caspar Brooke, in spite of all his faults, was a lover of dumb animals, and of children, and must therefore have possessed a certain amount of kindness of disposition.

Mr. Brooke dined at six o'clock, then smoked a cigar and had a cup of black coffee brought to him in the untidy little sanctum where he generally did his work. With the coffee came the black kitten, which sidled up to him on the table, purring, and rubbing her head against his arm as if she knew him for a friend. He stroked it occasionally as he read his evening papers, and stroked it in the caressing way which cats love, from its forehead to the tip of its stumpy tail. It was while he was thus engaged—that a tap at the door was heard, and the tap was followed by the entrance of a young man, who looked as if he were quite at home.

"Can I come in?" he said, in a perfunctory sort of way; and then, without waiting for any reply, went on—"I've no engagement to-night, so I thought I would look in here first, and see whether you had started."

"All right. Where have you been?"

"Special meeting—Church and State Union," said the young man with a smile. "I went partly in a medical capacity, partly because I was curious to know how they managed to unite the two professions."

"Couldn't your sister tell you?"

"Oh, I don't allow Ethel to attend such mixed gatherings," said the visitor, seating himself on the edge of the library table, and beginning to play with the cat.

"You are unusually particular," said Mr. Brooke, with an amused look. But Maurice Kenyon, as the visitor was named, continued to attract the kitten's notice, without the answering protest which Caspar Brooke had expected.

Maurice Kenyon was nearly thirty, and had stepped by good fortune into the shoes of a medical uncle who had left him a large and increasing general practice in the West Central district. The young man's popularity was not entirely owing to his skill, although he had an exceedingly good repute among his brethren in medicine. Neither was it attributable to good looks. He owed it rather to a sympathetic manner, to the cheerful candor of his dark grey eyes, to the mixture of firmness and delicate kindness



by which his treatment of his patients was characterized. He was especially successful in his dealings with children ; and he had therefore a good deal of adoration from grateful mothers to put up with. But of his skill and intellectual power there could be no doubt ; and these qualities, coupled with his winning manner, bade fair to raise him to a very high place in his profession.

There was one little check, and one only, to the flow of Mr. Kenyon's prosperity. Careful mothers occasionally objected that he was not married, and that his sister was an actress. Why did he let his sister go on the stage ? And why, if she was an actress, did he allow her to live in his house ? It did not seem quite respectable in the eyes of some worthy people that these things should be. But Mr. Kenyon only laughed when reports of these sayings reached him, and went on his way unmoved, as his sister Ethel went on hers. And in London, the question of a doctor's relations, his sisters, his cousins, his aunts, and what they do for a living, is not so important as it is in the country. Maurice Kenyon's care of his sister, and her devotion to him, were well known by all their friends ; and as he sometimes said, it mattered very little to him what all the rest of the world might think.

"Talking of your sister, Kenyon," said Mr. Brooke, somewhat abruptly, "I suppose you know that my daughter comes to me to-morrow ?"

The connection of ideas was not, perhaps, very obvious, but Maurice Kenyon nodded as if he understood.

"I suppose she will want a companion. Would Ethel be so kind as to call on her ?"

"Certainly. She will do all she can for Miss Brooke, I am sure."

"I have been speaking to Mrs. Romaine, too."

"Have you ?" Kenyon raised his eyebrows a very little, but Mr. Brooke did not seem to notice the change of expression.

"—And she promises to do what she can ; but a woman like Mrs. Romaine is not likely to find many subjects in common with a girl fresh from a convent."

"I suppose not"—in the driest of tones.

"Mrs. Romaine," said Brooke, in a more decided tone, "is a cultivated woman who has made a mark in literature——"

"In literature?" queried the doctor.

"She has written a novel or two. She writes for various papers—well and smartly, I believe. She is a thorough woman of the world. Naturally, a girl brought up as Lesley has been will——"

"—Will find her detestable," said Kenyon, briskly, "as I and Ethel do. You'll excuse this expression of opinion; you've heard it before."

For a moment Caspar Brooke's face was overcast; then he broke into uneasy laughter, and rose from his chair, shaking himself a little as a big dog sometimes does when it comes out of the water.

"You are incorrigible," he said. "A veritable heretic on the matter of my friend, Mrs. Romaine. By the by, I must remind you, Kenyon, that Mrs. Romaine is a very old friend of mine."

His manner changed slightly as he spoke. There was a little touch of quiet hauteur in his look and tone, as if he wished to repel unsolicited criticism. Maurice understood the man too well to be offended, and merely changed the subject.

But when, after half an hour's chat, the young doctor left the house, his mind reverted to the topic which Mr. Brooke had broached.

"Mrs. Romaine, indeed! Why, the man's mad—to introduce her as a friend to his daughter! Does not all the world know that Mrs. Romaine caused the separation between him and his wife? And will the poor girl know? or has she been kept in the dark completely as to the state of affairs? Upon my word I'm sorry for her. It strikes me that she will have a hard row to hoe, if Mrs. Romaine is at her father's ear."

## CHAPTER V.

## OLIVER.

MR. BROOKE had not long quitted Mrs. Romaine's drawing-room when it was entered by another man, whose personal resemblance to Mrs. Romaine herself was so striking that there could be little doubt as to their close relationship to one another. It was one of those curious likenesses that exist and thrive upon difference. Rosalind was not tall, and she was undeniably plump; while her younger brother, Oliver Trent, was above middle height, and of a spare habit. The creamy white of Mrs. Romaine's complexion had turned to deadly pallor in Oliver's thin, hairless face: and her most striking features were accentuated, and even exaggerated in his. Her arched and mobile eyebrows, her dark eyes, her broad nostrils, curved mouth, and finely-shaped chin, were all to be found, with a subtle unlikeness, in Oliver's face, and the jetty hair, short as it was on the man's head, grew low down on the brow and the nape of the neck exactly as hers did—although this resemblance was obscured by the fact that Rosalind wore a fringe, and carefully curled all the short hairs at the back of her head.

The greatest difference of all lay in the expression of the two faces. Mrs. Romaine had certainly no frankness in her countenance, but she had plenty of smiling pleasantness and play of emotion. Oliver's face was like a sullen mask: it was motionless, stolid even, and unamiable. There were people who raved about his beauty, and nicknamed him Antinous and Adonis. But these were not physiognomists.

Mrs. Romaine had two brothers, both some years younger than herself. Oliver, the youngest and her favorite, was about thirty, and called himself a barrister. As he had no briefs, however, it was currently reported that he lived by means of light literature, play, and judicious sponging upon his sister. The elder brother, Francis, was a ne'er-do-weel, and seldom appeared upon the scene

When he did appear, it was always a sign of trouble and want of cash.

"So you have had Brooke here again?" Oliver inquired.

"How did you know, Noll?"

She turned her dark eyes upon him rather anxiously. Oliver's views and opinions were of consequence to her.

"I saw him come in. I was coming up, but I turned round again and went away. Had a smoke in the Square till I saw him come out. Didn't want to spoil your little game, whatever it was."

He spoke with a kind of soft drawl, not unpleasing to the ear at first, but irritating if too long continued. It seemed to irritate his sister now. She tapped impatiently on the floor with her toe as she replied—

"How vulgar you are sometimes, Oliver! But all society is vulgar now-a-days, and I suppose one ought not to complain. I have no 'little game,' as you express it, and there was not the slightest need for you to have stayed away."

Oliver was sitting on a sofa, with his elbows on his knees and the tips of his long white fingers meeting each other. When Mrs. Romaine ended her petulant little speech he turned his dark eyes upon her and smiled. He said nothing, however, and his silence offended his sister even more than his speech.

"It is easy to see that you do not believe me," she said, "and I think it is very rude of you to be so sceptical. If you *have* any remarks to make on the subject pray make them at once."

"My dear Rosy, I have no remarks to make at all," said Oliver, easily. "Take your own way and I shall take mine. You are good enough to give me plenty of rope, and I should be uncivil indeed if I commented on the length of yours."

Mrs. Romaine had been moving restlessly to and fro: she now stood still, on the hearthrug, her hands clasped before her, her face turned attentively towards her brother. Evidently she was struck by his words.

"If you would speak out," she said at last, her smooth voice vibrating as if he had touched some chord of passion which was usually hushed to silence, "I should know better what you mean. You deal too much in hints and insinuations. You have said things of this sort before. I must know what you mean."

"Come, Rosy," said Oliver, rising from his low seat and confronting her, "don't be so tragic—so intense. Plump little women like you shouldn't go in for tragedy. Smile, Rosy; it is your *métier* to smile. You have won a good many games by smiling. You must smile on now—to the bitter end."

He smiled himself as he looked at her—an unpleasant smile, with thin lips drawn back from white sharp looking teeth, which gave him the air of a snarling dog. Mrs. Romaine's face belied his words. It was tragic enough, intense enough, for a woman who had known mortal agony; the suggestion of placidity usually given by her smiling lips and rounded unwrinkled cheeks had disappeared; she might have stood for an impersonation of sorrow and despair. Oliver's mocking voice recalled her to herself.

"A very good pose, Rosalind. The Tragic Muse indeed. Are you going to rival Ethel Kenyon? I am afraid it is rather late for you to go on the stage, that's all. Let me see: you have touched forty, have you not? I would acknowledge only thirty-nine if I were you. There is more than a year's difference between thirty-nine and forty."

The strained muscles of her face relaxed: she made a little impatient gesture with her hands, then turned to the fireplace, and with one arm upon the mantelpiece, looked down into the fire.

"You drive me nearly mad sometimes, Oliver," she said, in a low, passionate voice, "by your habit of saying only half a thing at a time. I know well enough that you are remonstrating with me now: that you disapprove of something—and will not tell me what. By and by, if I am in trouble or perplexity, you will turn round upon me and say that you warned me—told me that you disapproved—or something of that sort. You always do it, and it is not fair. Innuendoes are not warnings."

"My dear Rosalind," said her brother, coolly, "I hope I know my place. I'm ten years younger than you are, and have been at various times much indebted to your generosity. It does not become me to take exception at anything that girls may like to do."

He had the exasperating habit of treating kindness to himself with an air of condescension, as if he conferred a

favor by accepting benefits. His smile of superiority hurt Mrs. Romaine.

"When you adopt that tone, Oliver, I hate you!" she cried.

"You are very impulsive, Rbsy—in spite of your years," said Oliver, with his usual quietness. "I assure you I do not wish to interfere; and you must set it down to brotherly affection if I sometimes feel inclined to wonder what you mean to do."

"To do?" she queried, looking round at him.

"Yes, to do. I don't understand you, that is all. Of course, it is not necessary that I should understand."

Mrs. Romaine did not often change color, but she flushed scarlet now, and was glad for a moment that the room was almost dark. Yet, as her brother stood close to her, and the fire was sending up fitful flashes of ruddy light, she felt certain, on reflection, that he had seen that blush. This certainly imparted some humility to her voice as she spoke again.

"You know, Oliver, that I always like you to approve of what I am doing. I like you to understand. Of course, whatever I do, it is partly for your sake."

"Is it?" said Oliver, with a laugh. "I shouldn't have thought it. As far as I can judge, you have been very careful to please yourself all through."

There was a little silence. Then she said, in a low tone,

"*How* have I pleased myself, I should like to know?"

"Do you want a plain statement of facts? Well, my dear, you know them as well as I do, though perhaps you do not know the light in which they present themselves to me. We three, you and Francis and I, were left to earn our own living at a somewhat early age. Francis became a banker's clerk, and you took to literature and governessing and general popularity. By a very clever stroke you managed to induce Professor Romaine to marry you. He was fifty and you were twenty-four. You did very well for yourself—twisted him round your little finger, and got him to leave you all his money; but really I do not see how this could be said to be for my sake."

"Then you are very ungrateful, Oliver. You were a boy of fourteen when I married, and what would you have done but for Mr. Romaine and myself?"

"You forget, my dear," said Oliver, smoothly, "that I was never exactly dependent on you for a livelihood. I

took scholarships at school and college, and there was a certain sum of money invested in the Funds for my other expenses. It was perhaps not a large sum, but it was enough. I have to thank you for some very pleasant weeks at your house during the holidays; but there was really no necessity for you to marry Peter Romaine in order to provide for my holidays."

She winced under his tone of banter, but did not speak. She seemed resolved to let him say what he liked. Rosalind Romaine might not be perfect in all relations of life, but she was certainly a good sister.

"When a few years had elapsed," her brother went on, in a light narrative tone, "I'll grant that Romaine was of considerable service to us. He got Francis out of several scrapes, and he shoved me into a Government office, where the duties are not particularly onerous. Oh, yes, I owe some thanks to Romaine."

"And none to me for marrying him?"

Oliver laughed. "My dear Rosy," he said, "I have mentioned before that I consider you married him to please yourself."

She shrugged her shoulders, but said nothing more.

"Romaine became useful to me, of course," said Oliver, reflectively; "and then came the first extraordinary hitch. We met the Brookes—how many years ago—nearly twelve, I suppose; and you formed a gushing friendship with Lady Alice Brooke and her husband, especially with her husband."

"Why do you rake up these old stories?"

"Because I want to understand your position. You amazed me then, and you seem more than ever disposed to amaze me now. You were attracted by Caspar Brooke—heaven knows why! and you made no secret of the fact. You liked the man, and he liked you. I don't know how far the friendship went——"

"There was nothing in it but the most ordinary, innocent acquaintanceship!"

"Lady Alice did not think so. Lady Alice made a devil of a row about it, as far as I understand. Everyone who knows the story blames you, Rosalind, for the quarrel and separation between husband and wife."

"It was not my fault."

"Oh, was it not? Well, perhaps not. At any rate, the husband and wife separated quietly, twelve years ago.

I don't know whether you hoped that Brooke would give his wife any justification for her suspicions——"

"Oliver, you are brutal ! You insult me ! I have never given you reason to think so ill of me."

"I think of you," said Oliver, slowly, "only as I think of all women. I don't suppose you are better or worse than the rest. As it happened the whole thing seemed to die down after that separation. Romaine whisked you off to Calcutta with him. Then he fell ill, and you had to nurse him: you and your friend Brooke did not often meet. Then your husband died, after a long illness, and you came here again three years ago—for what object ?"

"I had no object but that of living in a part of London which was familiar to me—and of being amongst friends. You have no right at all to call me to account in this way."

"So I said a few minutes ago. But you remarked that you wished me to understand and approve of your proceedings. I am only trying to get at your motives—if you have any."

Mrs. Romaine was tempted to say that she had no motives. But she did not think that Oliver would believe her.

"Here you are," he went on, in his soft, slow voice, "in friendly—I might say familiar—relations with this man again. His wife is still living, and as bitter against him as ever, but not likely to give him any pretext for a divorce. You cannot marry him. Why do you provoke people to say ill-natured things about you by continuing so aimless a friendship ?"

"I don't think that any one would take the trouble of saying ill-natured things about me, Oliver," said Mrs. Romaine, forcing a smile. "We are too conventional, too advanced, now-a-days, for that kind of thing. Friendship between a man and woman is by no means the abnormal and unheard-of thing that it used to be."

"You are not so free as you think you are. You are still good-looking—still young. You cannot afford to defy the world. And I cannot afford to defy it either. I don't mind a reasonable amount of laxity, but I do not want my sister to be the heroine of a scandal."

"I think you might trust me to take care of myself."

"I would not say a word if Brooke were a widower. Although I don't like him, I acknowledge that he is the



sort of big blundering brute that suits some women. But there's no chance with him, so why should you make a fool of yourself?"

Mrs. Romaine turned round with a fierce little gesture of contradiction, but restrained herself, and did not speak for a minute or two.

"What do you want me to do?" she said at last, in rather a breathless kind of way.

'Well, my dear Rosy, since you ask me, I should say that it would be far wiser to drop Brooke's acquaintance."

"That is impossible."

"And why impossible?"

"His daughter is coming to him for a year: he has been here to-night to ask me to call on her—to chaperone her sometimes."

"Is the man a fool?" said Oliver.

"I think," Mrs. Romaine answered, somewhat unsteadily, "that Mr. Brooke never knew—exactly—that his wife was jealous of me."

"Oh, that's too much to say. He must have known."

"I am pretty sure that he did not. From things that he has said to me, I feel certain that he attributed only a passing irritation to her on my account. You do not believe me, Oliver; but I think that he is perfectly ignorant of the real cause of her leaving him."

"And *you* know it?"

"I know it, and Lady Alice knows it: no one else."

"What was it, then? You mean more than simple jealousy, I see."

"Yes, but—I am not obliged to tell you what it was."

"Oh, no. Keep your own counsel, by all means. But you are placing yourself in a very risky position. Lady Alice Brooke knows something that would, I suppose, compromise you in the world's eyes, if it were generally known. Her daughter is coming to Brooke's house. You mean—you seriously mean—to go to his house and visit this girl? thereby offending her mother (who is sure to hear of the visit) and bringing down the ill-will of all the Courtleroys upon your head? Have you no regard for your character and your position in the world? You are risking both, and you have nothing to gain."

"Yes, I have."

"What is it?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You mean you will not tell me?"

"Perhaps so."

Oliver Trent deliberately took a match-box from the mantelpiece, struck a match, and lighted a wax candle. "I should like to see your face," he said.

Rosalind looked at him fully and steadily for a few seconds; then her eyelids fell, and for the second time that evening the color mounted in her pale cheeks.

"I think that I know the truth," said her brother, composedly, after a careful study of her face. "You are mad, Rosalind, and you will live to rue that madness."

"I don't know what you mean," she said, turning away from the light of the candle. "You speak in riddles."

"I will speak in riddles, then, no longer. I will be very plain with you. Rosalind, you are in love with Caspar Brooke."

She sank down on a low chair as if her limbs would support her no longer, and rested her face upon her hands.

"No," she said, in a low voice, "you are wrong: I do not love Caspar Brooke."

"What other motive can you have?"

She waited for a moment, and then said, still softly—

"I suppose I may as well tell you. I loved him once. In those first days of our acquaintance—when he was disappointed in his wife and seeking for sympathy elsewhere—I thought that he cared for me. I was mistaken. Oliver, can you keep my secret? No other soul in the world knows of this from me but you. I told him my love. I wrote to him—a wild, mad letter—offering to fly to the ends of the earth with him if he would go."

Oliver stared at her as if he could not believe his ears.

"And what answer did he make?"

"He made none—because he never saw it. That letter fell into Lady Alice's hands. She did not know that it was the first that had been written: she took it to be one of a series. She wrote a short note to me about it; and the next thing I heard was that she had gone. But I know that he never saw that letter of mine."

"All this," said Oliver, in a hard contemptuous voice, "does not explain your present line of conduct."

She lifted her face from her hands. "Yes, it does," she said quickly. "If you were a woman you would under-

stand! Do you think I want her to come back to him? No, if he cannot make me happy, he shall not be happy at *her* side. I shall never forgive her for the words she wrote to me! If her daughter comes, Oliver, it is all the more reason why I should be here, ready to nip any notion of reconciliation in the bud. It is hate, not love, that dominates me: it is in my hatred for Caspar Brooke's wife that you must seek the explanation of my actions. *Now*, do you understand?"

"I understand enough," said Oliver, drily.

"And you will not interfere?"

"For the present I will not interfere. But I will not bind myself. I must see more of what you are doing before I make any promises. Whatever you do, you must not compromise yourself or me."

"Hate!" he repeated to himself scornfully as he left the house at a somewhat later hour in the evening. "It is all very well to put it down to her hate for Lady Alice. She is still in love with Brooke; and that is the beginning and the end of it."

And Oliver was not far wrong.

## CHAPTER VI.

## LESLEY COMES HOME.

CASPAR BROOKE was a busy man, and he was quite determined that his daughter's arrival should make no difference in his habits. In this determination he was less selfish than stern : he had reason to believe that his wife's treatment of him proceeded from folly and fickleness, and that his daughter had inherited her foibles. It was not worth while, he said to himself, to make any radical change in his way of life : Lesley must accommodate herself, if she could, to his habits ; and if she could not, she must go back to her mother. He was not prepared, he told himself, to alter his hours, or his friendships, or his peculiarities one whit for Lesley's sake.

Lesley arrived an hour later than the time at which she had been expected. It was nearly eight o'clock when her cab stopped at the door of the house in Upper Woburn Place, and the evening was foggy and cold. To Lesley, fresh from the clear skies and air of a French city, street, house, and atmosphere alike seemed depressing. The chimes of St. Pancras' church, woefully out of tune, fell on her ear, and made her shiver as she mounted the steps that led to the front door. How dear they were to grow to her in time she did not then suspect, nor would have easily believed ! At present their discordance was part of the general discordance of all things, and increased the weight of dejection which lay upon her. Her mother's maid had orders to deliver her over to Mr. Brooke and then to come away : she was not to spend an hour in the house, nor to partake of food within its walls. She had strict orders from Lady Alice on this point.

The house was a very good house, as London dwellings go ; but to Lesley's eyes it looked strangely mean and narrow. It was very tall, and the front was painted a chocolate brown. The double front doors, which opened to admit Lesley's boxes, showed an ordinary London hall,

narrow, crowded with an oaken chest, an umbrella and hat stand, and lighted by a flaring gas lamp. At these doors two persons showed themselves; a neat but hard-featured maid-servant, and a lady of uncertain age, whom Lesley correctly guessed to be his sister and housekeeper, Miss Brooke. There was no sign of her father.

"Is this Mr. Brooke's house?" inquired Dayman, formally. She used to know Mr. Brooke by sight, for she had lived with Lady Alice for many years.

"Yes, this is the house, and this is his daughter, I suppose?" said Miss Brooke, coming forward, and taking Lesley's limp hand in hers. Miss Brooke had a keen, clever, honest face, but she was undeniably plain, and Lesley was not in a condition to appreciate the kindness of her glance.

"I must see Mr. Brooke himself before I leave my young lady," Dayman announced.

"Run and fetch your master, Sarah," said Miss Brooke, quickly. "He cannot have heard the cab."

The white aproned servant disappeared into the back premises, and thence, in a moment or two, issued Mr. Caspar Brooke himself, at the sight of whom Miss Brooke involuntarily frowned and bit her lip. She saw at one glance that Caspar was in his "study-coat," that his hair was dishevelled, and that he had just laid down his pipe. These were small details in themselves, but they meant a good deal. They meant that Caspar Brooke would not do a single thing, would not go a single step out of his way, to conciliate the affections of Lady Alice's daughter. He had never in his life looked more of a Bohemian than he did just then. And Miss Brooke suspected him of wilful perversity.

The lights swam before Lesley's eyes. The vision of a big, brown-bearded man, bigger and broader, it seemed to her, than any man she had ever spoken to before, took away her senses. As he came up to her she involuntarily shrank back; and when he stooped to kiss her, the novel sensation of his bristly beard against her face, the strong scent of tobacco, and the sense that she was unwelcome, all contributed towards complete self-betrayal. Dizzy from her voyage; faint, sick, and unhinged, she almost pushed him away from her and sank down on a hall-chair with a burst of sobbing which she could not control. She was

terribly ashamed of herself next moment ; but the next moment was too late. She had made as bad a beginning as she had it in her power to make, and no after-apology could alter what was done.

For a moment a dead silence fell on the little group. Miss Brooke heard her brother mutter something beneath his breath in a very angry tone. She wondered whether his daughter heard it too. The faithful and officious Dayman immediately pressed forward with soothing words and offers of help.

"There, there, my dear young lady, don't take on so. It won't be for long, remember ; and I'll come for you again to take you back to your mamma——"

"You had better leave her alone, Dayman," said Mr. Brooke, coldly. "She will probably be more reasonable by and bye."

Lesley was on her feet again in a moment. "I am not unreasonable," she said distinctly, but with a little catch in her voice ; "it is only that I am tired and upset with the journey—and the sudden light was too much for me. Give mamma my love, Dayman, and say that I am very well."

"Are the boxes all in ?" asked Mr. Brooke. "We need not detain you, Mrs. Dayman."

Dayman turned and dropped him a mocking curtsy. "I have my orders from my mistress, sir. Having seen the young lady safe into your hands, I will go back to my lady at the railway station, where she now is, and tell her how she was received."

Miss Brooke, glancing anxiously at her brother, saw him bite his lip and frown. He did not speak, but he pointed to the door in a manner which Dayman did not see fit to disobey.

"Good-bye, Miss Lesley—and I'll look forward to the day when I see you back again," said the maid, in a tone of profound commiseration.

"Good-bye, Dayman, give my love to mamma," said Lesley. She would dearly have liked to add, "Don't tell her that I cried ;" but with that circle of unsympathetic faces round her, she did not dare. She pressed her lips together, dashed the tears from her eyes, and managed to smile, however, as Dayman took her departure.

Meanwhile, Miss Brooke had quietly sent the maid for a glass of wine, which she administered to the girl without

further ado. Lesley drank it obediently, and felt reinvigorated : but although her courage rose, her spirit remained sadly low as she looked at her father's face, and saw that it wore an uncompromising frown.

"You had better have these boxes carried upstairs as soon as possible," he remarked to his sister. "I will say good-night now : I have to go out."

He turned away rather brusquely, and went back into his study, which was situated behind the dining-room, on the ground-floor. Lesley looked after him helplessly, with a mingled feeling of offence and relief. She did not see him again, but was conveyed to her room by Miss Brooke, who spoke to her kindly indeed, but with a matter-of-fact directness which seemed hard and cold to the convent-bred girl, whose teachers and guardians had vied with one another in sugared sweetness and a tutored amiability of demeanor.

Lesley was taken up two flights of stairs to a room which seemed close and stuffy to her, although in English eyes it might be deemed comfortable and even luxurious. But padded arm-chairs and couch, eider-down silken-covered quilts, cushions, curtains, and carpets, were things of which she had as yet no great appreciation. The room seemed to her altogether too full of furniture, and she longed to run to the window for a breath of fresh air. Miss Brooke, observing how white she looked, asked her if she felt faint.

"No, thank you ; I am only tired," said Lesley.

"You would like some tea, perhaps?"

"Thank you," said the girl, rather hesitatingly. Nobody drank tea at the convent, and in her visits to Lady Alice she had not cultivated a taste for it. "I think I would rather go to bed."

"You must have something to eat before you go," said Miss Brooke, drily. "Here, let me feel your pulse. Yes, you need food, and I'll send you up a soothing draught as well. You need not look so astonished, my dear : don't you know that I'm a doctor?"

"A doctor! *You!*" Lesley looked round the room as if seeking for some place in which to hide from such a monstrosity.

"Yes, a doctor—a lady doctor," said Miss Brooke, with grim but not unmirthful emphasis. "You never saw me

before, did you? Well, I'm not in general practice just now ; my health would not stand it, so I am keeping my brother's house instead ; but I am fully qualified, my dear, I assure you, and can prescribe for you if you are ill as well as any physician in the land."

She laughed as she spoke, and there was a humorous twinkle in her shrewd, kindly eyes, which Lesley did not understand. As a matter of fact, her innocent horror and amaze tickled Miss Brooke immensely. It was evident that this girl, with her foreign, aristocratic, and Catholic training knew nothing at all of the strides that have of late been made in the direction of female emancipation ; and her ignorance was amusing to Miss Brooke, who was one of the foremost champions of the woman's cause. Miss Sophia Brooke, whose name was on every committee under the sun, who spoke at meetings and wrote half a dozen letters after her name, to have a niece who had never met a lady doctor in her life before, and probably did not know anything at all about women's franchise ! It was quite too funny, and Miss Brooke—or Doctor Brooke, as she liked better to be called—was genuinely amused. But it was not an amusing matter to Lesley, who felt as if the foundations of the solid world were shaking underneath her.

If she had heard of women doctors at all it was in terms of bitterest reprobation : she had been told that they were not persons of respectability, that they were "without the pale," and she had believed all she was told. And here she was, shut up for a year with a woman of the very class that she had been taught to reprobate—a woman, too, who, although no longer young, had a face which was pleasant to look upon, because it expressed refinement and kindness as well as intellectual power, and whose dress, though plain, was severely neat, well-fitting, and of rich material. In fact, Miss Brooke was so unlike anything in the shape of womankind that Lesley had ever encountered, that the girl could only gaze at her in speechless amazement, and wonder whether *she* was expected to develop into something of the same sort !

She could not deny, however, that her aunt was very good-natured. Miss Brooke helped her to undress, put her to bed, unpacked her boxes in about half the time that a maid would have taken to do the work ; then she brought



her something to eat and drink, and waited on her with the care of a woman with a truly kindly heart. Lesley began to take courage and to ask questions.

"I suppose I shall see my father again to-morrow morning," she said.

"About mid-day you may see him," Miss Brooke answered, cheerfully. "He will be out till two or three in the morning, you know; and of course he can't be disturbed very early. You must remember that we keep the house very quiet until eleven or twelve, when he generally comes down. He breakfasts then, and goes out."

Lesley was mystified. Why did her father keep such extraordinary hours? She had not the slightest notion that these were the usual arrangements of a journalist's life. She thought that he must be very thoughtless, very self-indulgent, even very wicked. Surely her mother had been more than justified in leaving him. She laid her head upon the pillow, feeling rather inclined to cry.

Miss Brooke had not much of a clue to her emotions; but she was trying hard to fathom what was passing in the girl's mind, and she came very near the mark. She stooped down and kissed her affectionately.

"I daresay you feel lonely and strange, my dear," she said; "but you must remember that you have come to your own home, and that we belong to you, and you to us. So you must put up with us for a time, and you may—eventually—come to like us, you know. Stranger things than that have happened before now."

Lesley put one arm round her aunt's neck, undeterred by Miss Brooke's laugh and the little struggle she made to get away.

"Thank you," she said, "for being so kind. I am sorry I cried when I came in."

"You were hysterical and overwrought. I shall tell your father so."

"You think he was vexed?"

"I suppose," said Miss Brooke, "that a man hardly likes to see his daughter burst out crying and shrink away when she first looks at him."

"Oh, I was very stupid!" cried Lesley, remorsefully. "It must have looked so bad, and I did not mean anything—at least, I meant only——"

"I understand all about it," said her aunt, "and I shall tell your father what I think if he alludes to the matter."

In the meantime you had better go to sleep, and wake up fresh and bright in the morning. 'Good-night, my dear.'

And Lesley was left to her own reflections.

Although she went early to bed she did not sleep soon or soundly. There was not much traffic along the street in which her father lived, but the bells of St. Pancras rang out the hours and the quarters with painful tunelessness, and an occasional rumble of wheels would startle her into wakeful terror. At half-past two in the morning she heard the opening and shutting of the front door, and her father's footsteps on the stairs as he came up to bed. There seemed to her something uncanny in these nocturnal habits. The life of a journalist, of a literary man, of anybody who did any definite work in the world at all, was quite unknown to her.

She came down to breakfast at nine o'clock, feeling weary and depressed. Miss Brooke was kind but preoccupied; she had a committee at twelve, she said, and another at four, so she would be obliged to leave Lesley for the greater part of the day. "But you will have your own little arrangements to make you know," she said, "and Sarah will show you or tell you anything you want. You might as well fall into our ways as soon as you can."

"Oh, yes," said Lesley. "I only want to be no trouble."

"You'll be no trouble to anybody," said Miss Brooke, cheerfully, "so long as you find something to do, and do it. There's a good library of books in the house, and a piano in the drawing-room; and you ought to go out for an hour or two every day. I daresay you will be able to occupy yourself."

"Is there any one to go out with me?" queried Lesley, timidly. She had never been out alone in the whole course of her life.

"Go out with you?" repeated Miss Brooke, rather rudely, though with kind intent. "An able-bodied young woman of eighteen or nineteen surely can take care of herself! You are not in Paris now, my dear, you are in London; and girls in London have to be independent and courageous."

Lesley felt that she was being somewhat unjustly judged, but she did not like to reply. And her aunt, conscious of having spoken sharply, became immediately more gentle in manner, and told her certain details about the arrange-

ments of the house, which it behoved Lesley to know, with considerable thoughtfulness and kind feeling.

Mr. Brooke usually rang for his coffee about half-past ten, and came down at half-past eleven. He then had breakfast served to him in the dining-room, and did not join his sister at luncheon at all. In the afternoon he walked out, or wrote, or saw friends; dined at six, and went down to the office of his paper at eight. From the office he did not usually return until the small hours of the morning; and then, as Miss Brooke explained, he often sat up writing or reading for an hour or two longer.

"Why does he work so late?" asked Lesley, innocently. "I should have thought the day-time was pleasanter."

Miss Brooke gave a short, explosive laugh, fixed a pair of eyeglasses on the bridge of her nose, and looked at Lesley as if she were a natural curiosity.

"Have you yet to learn," she said, "that we don't do what is pleasant in this life, but what we *must*?"

Then she got up and went away from the breakfast-table, leaving Lesley ashamed and confounded. The girl leaned her elbows upon the white cloth, and furtively wiped a tear away from her eyes. She found herself in a new atmosphere, and it did not seem to her a very congenial one. She was bewildered; it did not appear possible that she could live for a year in a home of this very peculiar kind. To her uncultivated imagination, Mr. Brooke and his sister looked to her like barbarians. She did not understand their ways at all.

She spent the morning in unpacking her things, and arranging them, with rather a sad heart, in her room. She did not like to go downstairs until the luncheon-bell rang; and then she found that she was to lunch alone. Miss Brooke was out; Mr. Brooke was in his study.

The white-capped and severe-visaged middle-aged servant, who was known as Sarah, came to Lesley after the meal with a message.

"Mr. Brooke says, Miss, that he would like to see you in his study, if you can spare him a few minutes."

Lesley flushed hotly as she was shown into the smoky, little den. It was a scene of confusion, such as she had never beheld before. The table was heaped high with papers: books and maps strewed every chair: even the floor was littered with bulky tomes and piles of manuscript.

At a knee-hole table Caspar Brooke was sitting, writing hard, as if for dear life, his loose hair falling heavily over his big forehead, his left hand grasping his thick brown beard. He looked up as Lesley entered, and gave her a nod.

"Good-morning," he said. "Wait a minute: I must finish this and send it off by the quarter to three post. I have just done."

He went on writing, and Lesley stood motionless beside the table, with a feeling of dire offence in her proud young heart. Why had he sent for her if he did not want her? She was half inclined to walk away without another word. Only a sense of filial duty restrained her. She thought to herself that she had never been treated so unceremoniously—even in her earliest days at school. And she was surprised to find that so small a thing could ruffle her so much. She had hardly known at the convent, or while visiting her mother, that she had such a thing as a "temper." It suddenly occurred to her now that her temper was very bad indeed.

And in truth she had a hot, strong temper—very like her father's, if she had but known it—and a will that was prone to dominate, not to submit itself to others. These were facts that she had yet to learn.

"Well, Lesley," said Caspar Brooke, laying down his pen, "I have finished my work at last. Now we can talk."

## CHAPTER VII.

## FRIENDS AND FOES.

SOMETHING in the slightly mutinous expression of Lesley's face seemed to strike her father. He looked at her fixedly for a minute or two, then smiled a little, and began to busy himself amongst his papers.

"You are very like your mother," he said.

Lesley felt a thrill of strong indignation. How dared he speak of her mother to her without shame and grief and repentance? She flushed to her temples and cast down her eyes, for ~~she~~ ~~was~~ resolved to say nothing that she might afterwards regret.

"Won't you sit down?" said Mr. Brooke, indifferently. "You must make yourself at home, you know. If you don't, I'm afraid you will be uncomfortable. You will have to look after yourself."

Lesley made no answer. She was thinking that it would be very disagreeable to look after herself. She did not know how clearly her face expressed her sentiments.

"You don't much like the prospect, apparently?" said her father. "Well"—for he was becoming a little provoked by her silence—"what *would* you like? Do you want a maid?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said Lesley, startled into speech.

"You can have one if you like, you know. Speak to your aunt about it. I suppose you have not been accustomed to wait upon yourself. Can you do your own hair?"

He spoke with a smile, half-indulgent, half-contemptuous. Lesley remembered, with intuitive comprehension of his mood, that her mother was singularly helpless, and never dressed without Dayman's help, or brushed the soft tresses that were still so luxuriant and so fair. She rebelled at once against the unspoken criticism.

"I can do everything for myself," she said; "I can do my own hair and mend my dresses and everything, because

I am a schoolgirl ; but of course when I am older I expect to have my own maid, as every lady does."

Mr. Brooke's short, hard laugh was distinctly unpleasing to her ear.

"I think you will find, when you are older," he said, with an emphasis on the words, "that a great many ladies have to do without maids—and very much better for them that they should—but as I do not wish to stint you in anything, nor to oppose any fairly reasonable desire of yours, I will tell your aunt to get you a maid as soon as possible."

"Oh, no, please!" cried Lesley, more alarmed than pleased by the prospect. "I really do not wish for one ; I do not wish you to have the trouble—the ex——"

She stopped short: she did not quite like to speak of the "expense."

"It will not be much trouble to me if Sophia finds you a maid," said her father drily ; "and as to the expense, which is ~~what~~ I suppose you were going to allude to, I am quite well able to ~~afford~~ it. Otherwise I should not have proposed such a thing."

Lesley felt herself snubbed, and did not like it, ~~but again~~ kept silence.

"I cannot promise you much amusement while you stay here," Mr. Brooke went on, "but anything that you like to see or hear when you are in town can be easily provided for. I mean in the way of picture galleries, concerts, theatres—things of that kind. Your Aunt Sophia will probably be too much occupied to take you to such places ; but if you have a maid you will be pretty independent. I wonder she did not think of it herself. Of course a maid can go about with you, and so relieve her mind."

"I am sorry to be troublesome," said Lesley, stiffly.

He cast an amused glance at her. "You won't trouble *me*, my dear. And Mrs. Romaine says that she will call and make your acquaintance. I dare say you will find her a help to you."

"Is she—a friend of yours?"

"A very old friend," said Caspar Brooke, with decision. "Then there are the Kenyons, who live opposite. Ethel Kenyon is a clever girl—a great favorite of mine. Her brother is a doctor."

"And she lives with him and keeps his house?" said Lesley, growing interested.

"Well, she lives with him. I don't know that she does much in the way of keeping his house. I hope I shall not shock your prejudices"—how did he know that she had any prejudices?—"if I tell you that she is an actress."

"An actress!"—Lesley flushed with surprise, even with a little horror, though at the same moment she was conscious of a movement of pleasant curiosity and a desire to know what an actress was like in private life.

"I thought you would be horrified," said her father, looking at her with something very like satisfaction. "How could you be anything else? How long have you lived in a French convent? Eight or ten years, is it not? Ah, well, I can't be surprised if you have imbibed the conventional idea of what you would call, I suppose, your class." He gave a little shrug to his broad shoulders. "It can't be helped now. You must make yourself as happy as you can, my poor child, as long as you are here, and console yourself with visions of your happy future at the Courtleroy's."

It was exactly what Lesley intended to do, and yet she felt hurt by the slightly contemptuous pity of his tone.

"I have no doubt that I shall be very happy," she said, steadying her voice as well as she could; "and I hope that you will not concern yourself about me."

"I should not have time to do so if I wished," he answered coolly. "I never concern myself about anything but my proper business, which is *not* to look after girls of eighteen——"

"Then why did you send for me here?" she asked, with lightning rapidity.

The question seemed to surprise him. He raised his eyebrows as he looked at her.

"That was a family arrangement made many years ago," he answered at last deliberately. "And I think it was a wise one. There is no reason why you should grow up in utter ignorance of your father. And I prefer you to come when you have arrived at something like a reasonable age, rather than when you were quite a child. As you *are* at a reasonable age, Lesley," with a lightening of his tones, "I suppose you have some tastes, some inclinations, of your own? What are they?"

It must have been obstinacy that prompted Lesley's answer. "I have no taste," she said, looking down. "No inclinations."

"Are you not fond of music?"

"I play a little—a very little."

"Oh." The tone was one of disappointment. "Art? Drawing—carving—modelling—any of the fads young ladies are so fond of now-a-days?"

"No."

"Do you read much?"

"No."

"What do you do, then?"

"I can embroider a little," said Lesley, calmly. "The nuns taught me. And I can dance."

She raised her eyes and studied the stormy expressions that flitted one after another across her father's face. She knew that she had taken a delight in provoking him, and she wondered whether he was not going to retaliate by an angry word. But after a few moments' pause he only said—

"Would you like any lessons in singing or drawing now that you are in town?"

The offer was a temptation to Lesley. Yes, she would dearly have liked some good singing lessons; her mother even had suggested that she should take them while she was in London. She was the fortunate possessor of a voice that was worth cultivating, and she longed to make the best of her time. But she had come with the notion that her father was poor, and that she must not be an unnecessary expense to him; and this idea had not been counteracted by any appearance of luxury or lavish expenditure in her London home. The furniture, except in her own room, was heavy, old-fashioned, and decidedly shabby. Her father seemed to work very hard. He had already promised her a maid; and Lesley could not bear to ask him for anything else. So she answered—

"No, I think not, thank you."

There might be generosity, but there was also some resentment and hot temper at the bottom of Lesley's reply. This was a fact, however, that her father did not discern. He merely paused for a moment, nodded his head once or twice, and seemed slightly disconcerted. Then he said—

"Very well; do just as you like. Your aunt has a Mudie subscription, I believe"—what this meant Lesley had not the faintest idea—"and you will find books in the library, and a piano in the drawing-room. You must ask



for anything you want." As if that was likely, Lesley thought! "I hope you will make friends and be comfortable. And—a—" he paused, and hesitated in his speech as he went on—"a—I hope—your mother—Lady Alice—was well when you left her?"

"Pretty well," Lesley answered, dropping her eyes.

"Was she going to Scotland for the winter?"

"I think so."

"Oh." He seemed satisfied with the answer. "By the way, Lesley, are you Catholic or Protestant?"

"Protestant. Mamma would not allow the Sisters to talk to me about religion. I always drove to the English Church on Sundays."

"Oh, very well. Do as you please. There are plenty of churches near us. But you need not bring more clergy than you can help to the house," said Brooke, with a peculiar smile. "I am not very fond of the Blacks. I am more of a Red myself, you know."

"A Red?" Lesley asked, helplessly.

"A Red Republican—Radical—Socialist—anything you like," said Brooke, laughing outright. "You didn't read the papers in your convent, I suppose. You had better begin to study them straight away. It will be a pleasant change from the Lives of the Saints. And now, if we have finished all that we have to say—I am rather busy, and——"

"Oh, I beg your pardon: I will go," said Lesley, rising at once. "I had no wish to intrude upon you," she added, with an attempt to be dignified and womanly, which she felt to be a miserable failure. Her father simply nodded in reply, took up his pen, and allowed her to leave the room.

But when she had gone, he put the pen down and sat back in his chair, musing. Lesley had surprised him a little. She had more force and fire in her composition than he had expected to find. She was, as he had said, very like her mother in face and figure; and the minute differences of line and contour that showed Lesley to be strong where Lady Alice had been weak, original where Lady Alice had been most conventional, intellectual where Lady Alice had been only intelligent, were not perceptible at first sight even to a practised observer of men and women like Caspar Brooke. But the flash of her brown

eyes, so like his own, and an occasional intonation in her voice, had told him something. She was in arms against him, so much he felt ; and she had more individuality than her mother, in spite of her ignorance. It was a pity that her education had been so much neglected ! Manlike, Caspar Brooke took literally every word that she had uttered ; and reproached himself for having allowed his foolish, frivolous wife to bring up his daughter in a place where she had been taught nothing but embroidery and dancing.

"It is a pity," he reflected ; "but we cannot alter the matter now. The poor girl will feel herself sadly out of place in this house, I fear ; but perhaps it won't do her any harm. She may be a better woman all her life—the idle, selfish, self-indulgent life that she is bound by all her traditions and her upbringing to lead—for having seen for a few months what honest work is like. She is too handsome not to marry well : let us only hope that Alice won't secure a duke for her. She will if she can ; and I—well, I haven't much opinion of dukes." And so with a laugh and a shrug, Caspar Brooke returned to his work.

Lesley went upstairs to the drawing-room with burning cheeks and a lump in her throat. She was offended by her father's manner towards her, although she could not but acknowledge that in essentials he had seemed wishful to be kind. And she knew that she had seemed ungracious and had felt resentful. But the resentment, she assured herself, was all on her mother's account. If he had treated Lady Alice as he had treated Lady Alice's daughter—with hardly concealed contempt, with the scornful indifference of one looking down from a superior height—Lesley did not wonder that her mother had left him. It was a manner which had never been displayed to her before, and she said to herself that it was horribly discourteous. And the worst of it was that it did not seem to be directed to herself alone : it included her friends the nuns, her mother, her mother's family, and all the circle of aristocratic relations to which she belonged. She was despised as part of the class which he despised ; and it was difficult for her to understand the situation.

It would have been easier if she could have set her father down as a mere boor, without refinement or intelligence ; but there was one item in her impression of him

which she could not reconcile with a want of culture. She was keenly sensitive to sound ; and voices were important to her in her judgment of acquaintances. Now, Caspar Brooke had a delightful voice. It was low, musical, and finely modulated : his accent, moreover, was particularly delicate and refined. Lesley had, without knowing it, the same charmingly modulated intonation ; and her father's voice was instinctively familiar to her. People had often said that it was hard to dislike a man with a voice like Caspar Brooke's ; and Lesley was not insensible to its fascination. No, he could not be a mere insensate clod, with that pleasant and cultivated voice, she decided to herself ; but he might be something worse—a heartless man of the word, who cared for nothing but himself and his own low ambitions : not a man who was worthy to be the husband of a gentle, loving, highly-organized woman like the daughter of Lord Courtleroy.

With a deep sigh, Lesley ceased at last to meditate, and began to look about her. The room was large and lofty, and had three windows, opening upon a balcony. There were more books than Lesley had usually seen in drawing-rooms, and there was a very handsome Broadwood grand piano. The furniture was mostly of the solid type, handsome enough, but very heavy. Lesley, noticed, however, that the prints and paintings on the walls were really good, and that there was some valuable china on the mantelpiece. It was not an ugly room after all, and it displayed signs of culture on the part of its occupants ; but Lesley turned from it with an impatient little shake of her head, expressive of deep disgust. And, indeed, it was sufficiently unlike the rooms to which she was accustomed to cause her considerable disappointment.

She drew aside the curtains which hung from the archway between the back room and the front ; and here her brow cleared. The one wide window looked out on a space of green grass and trees, inexpressibly refreshing to Lesley's eye. The walls were lined with rows of books, from floor to ceiling ; and some easy chairs and small tables gave a look of comfort and purpose to the room. It was Mr. Brooke's library, though not the room in which he did his work. That was chiefly done in his little den downstairs, or at his office in the city.

Lesley looked at the books with great and increasing pleasure. Here, indeed, was a joy of which her father

could not rob her. No one would take any notice of what she read. She could "browse undisturbed" over the whole field of English literature if she were so minded. And the prospect was a delight.

She sauntered back into the front room, and stood at one of the windows for a minute or two. Her attention was speedily attracted by a little pantomime at a window opposite her own—a drawing-room window, too, with a balcony before it, like the window at which she stood. A young lady in a white dress was talking to a black poodle, who was standing on his hind-legs, and a young man was balancing a bit of biscuit on the dog's nose. That was all. But the young lady was so extremely pretty, and the young man looked so cheerful and bright, and the poodle was such an extremely fascinating dog, that Lesley sighed in very envy of the felicity of all three. And it never crossed her mind that the pretty girl in the white costume, who had such a simple and natural look, could possibly be Ethel Kenyon, the actress, of whom her father had been speaking half an hour before. Yet such was the case.

She was still observing the figures at the window when the door opened, and Sarah announced a visitor.

"Mrs. Romaine, please, ma'am."

Whereupon Lesley remembered the "very old friend" whom Mr. Brooke had mentioned. But was this the very old friend? This young and fashionably-dressed woman, with short, dark, curling hair, and a white veil to enhance the whiteness of her complexion. Mrs. Romaine was very handsome, without a doubt, but Lesley did not like her.

"Miss Brooke?" said the visitor, in a silvery, flute-like voice, which the girl could not but admire. "You will forgive me for calling so soon? My old friendship with Mr. Brooke—whom I have known for years—made me anxious to see you, dear, as soon as possible. You will receive me also as a friend, I hope——"

There could be but one answer. Lesley was delighted.

"I have heard so much of you," murmured Mrs. Romaine, sitting down with the girl's hand in hers and gazing into her face with liquid, dreamy eyes; "and I wanted to know if I could not be of use to you. Dear Miss Brooke is so much occupied. I may call you Lesley, may I not? Dear Lesley, it will be the greatest possible pleasure to me to assist you in any way."

"Thank you very much," said Lesley, rather lamely.

"Dear," said Mrs. Romaine, "may I speak to you frankly? I knew your dear mother many years ago——"

Lesley turned upon her with suddenly kindled eyes.

"You knew mamma?"

"I did, indeed, and I cannot express to you what my feeling was for her. Love, admiration—these seem cold words: worship, Lesley, expresses more nearly what I felt! Can you wonder that I hasten to welcome her daughter to her home?"

Lesley's innocent heart warmed to the new-comer at once. How unjust she had been, she thought, to shrink for a moment from the visitor because of her youthful and ultra-fashionable appearance. Had she not found a friend?—a woman who loved her mother?

Mrs. Romaine saw the impression that she had made, and did not try to deepen it just then. She went on more lightly:

"I am a widow, you know, and I live in Russell Square. I hope that you will come and see me sometimes. Drop in whenever you like, and if there is anything that I can do for you count on me. You will want to go shopping or making calls sometimes when Miss Brooke is too busy to take you; then you must come to me. And how was dear Lady Alice when you saw her last?"

Lesley did not like these effusive expressions of affection. But she answered, gently—

"Mamma was quite well, thank you." Which answer did not give Mrs. Romaine all the information that she desired.

"I have been looking at a pretty poodle dog over the way," she went on, conscious of some desire to change the subject. "Its mistress has been putting it through all sorts of tricks—ah, there it is again!"

"The Kenyons' dog?" said Mrs. Romaine, smiling, as she looked at the little group which had once more formed itself upon the balcony. "Oh, I see. That is young Mr. Kenyon, the doctor, a great friend of your father's; and that is his sister, Ethel Kenyon, the actress."

"My father spoke about her," said Lesley.

"Oh, yes, he admires her very much. He wrote a long article about her in the *Tribune* once. Do you see the *Tribune* regularly? Your dear father writes a great deal

for it, and I am sure you must appreciate his exquisite writing."

"Do you know Miss Kenyon too?"

"Oh, yes, I know her very well. And I expect to know her better very soon, because I suppose we shall be connections before long."

Lesley looked a smiling inquiry.

"I have a younger brother—my brother Oliver," said Mrs. Romaine, with a little laugh; "and younger brothers, dear, have a knack of falling in love. He has fallen in love with Ethel, who is really a nice girl, as well as a pretty and a clever girl, and I believe they will be married by and by."

Lesley could not have said why, but somehow at that moment she was distinctly glad of the fact.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## OLIVER'S INTENTIONS.

"WELL, what is she like?" Oliver Trent asked, lightly, of his sister Rosalind, when they met that evening at dinner.

"Lesley Brooke? She is a handsome girl," said Mrs. Romaine, with some reserve of manner.

"Nothing more?"

His sister waited until the servant had left the room before she replied.

"I wish you would be discreet, Oliver. My servants are often at the Brookes' with messages. I should not like them to repeat what you were saying."

Oliver shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man to whom women's caprices are incomprehensible. But he was silent until dessert was placed upon the table, and Mrs. Romaine's neat parlor-maid had disappeared.

"Now," he said, "you can disburthen your mind in peace."

"Oliver," said Mrs. Romaine, abruptly. "I want you to make Miss Brooke's acquaintance as soon as you can. I don't understand her, and I think that you can help me."

"As how!"

"Oh, don't be silly. You always get on with girls, and you can tell me what you think of her."

Oliver raised his eyebrows, took a peach from the dish before him, and began to peel it with great deliberation.

"Handsome, you say?"

"Very."

"Like Lady Alice? I remember her; a willowy, shadowy creature, with a sort of ethereal loveliness which appealed very strongly to my imagination when I was a boy."

Mrs. Romaine flushed a little. It occurred to her that *she* had never been called shadowy or ethereal-looking.

"She is much more substantial than Lady Alice," she said, drily. "I should say that she had more individuality

about her. She looks to me like a girl of character and intellect."

"In which case your task will be the more difficult, you mean?"

"I don't know what you mean by a task. I have not set myself to do anything definite."

"No? Then you are very unlike your sex, Rosalind. I generally find women much too definite—damnably so."

"Well, then, I must be an exception. You are always trying to entrap me into damaging admissions, Oliver, and I won't put up with it. All that I want is to be sure that Lady Alice shall not return to her husband. But there is nothing definite in that."

"Oh, nothing at all," said Oliver, satirically. "All that you have got to do is to prejudice father and daughter against each other as much as possible, make Brooke believe that the girl has been set against him by her mother, and persuade Miss Brooke that her father is not the sort of man that Lady Alice can return to. Nothing definite in that, is there?"

"Oliver, you are quite too bad. I never made any plans of the kind." But there was a distinctly guilty look in Mrs. Romaine's soft eyes. "Besides, that is a piece of work which hardly needs doing. Father and daughter are too much alike to get on."

"Alike, are they?"

"Yes, in a sense. The girl is very like her mother, too—she has Lady Alice's features and figure, but the expression of her face is her father's. And her eyes and her brow are her father's. And she is like her father—I think—in disposition."

"You have found out so much that I think you scarcely need me to interview her in order to tell you more. What do you want me to do?"

"I want to find out more about Lady Alice. Could you not get Ethel Kenyon to ask her about her mother, and then persuade Ethel to tell you?"

"Can't take *Ethel* into our confidence," said Oliver with a disparaging emphasis upon the name. "She is such a little fool." And then he began to roll a cigarette for himself.



Mrs. Romaine watched him thoughtfully for a minute or two. "Noll," she said at length, "I thought you were really fond of Ethel?"

Oliver's eyes were fixed upon the cigarette that he was now lighting, and, perhaps, that was the reason why he did not answer for a minute or two. At last, he said, in his soft, drawling way—

"I am very fond of Ethel. And especially of the twenty thousand pounds that her uncle left her."

"Ethel Kenyon is handsome enough to be loved for something beside her money."

"Handsome? Oh, she's good-looking enough: but she's not exactly to my taste. A little too showy, too abrupt for me. Personally I like a softer, quieter woman; but as a rule the women that I really admire haven't got twenty thousand pounds."

"I know who would suit you," said Mrs. Romaine, leaning forward and speaking in a very low voice—"Lesley Brooke."

"What is her fortune? If it's a case of her face is her fortune, she really won't do for me, Rosy, however suitable she might be in other respects."

"But," said Mrs. Romaine, eagerly, "she is sure to have plenty of money. Her father is well off—better off than people know—and would probably settle a considerable sum upon her; then think of the Courtleroys—there is a fair amount of wealth in that family, surely——"

"Which they would be so very likely to give her if she married me," said her brother, with irony. "Moonshine, my dear. Do you think that Lady Alice would allow her daughter to marry your brother?—knowing what she does, and hating you as she does, would she like to be connected with you by marriage?"

"That is exactly why I wish that you would marry her," said Mrs. Romaine, almost below her breath. "Think of the triumph for me!"

Her eyes glowed, and she breathed more quickly as she spoke. "That woman scorned me—gloated over my sorrow and my love," she said; "she dared to reproach me for what she called my want of modesty—my want of womanly feeling, and—oh, I cannot tell you what she said! But this I know, that if I could reach her through her daughter or her husband, and stab her to the heart as she

once stabbed me, the dearest wish of my life would be fulfilled !”

“Women are always vindictive,” said Oliver, philosophically. “The fact is, you want to revenge yourself on Lady Alice through me, and yet you don’t consider *me* in the very least. If I married this Lesley Brooke, Lady Alice and all the Courtleroys would no doubt get into an awful rage with her and you and me and everybody ; and what would be the upshot ? Why, they would cut her off with a shilling and we should be next door to penniless. Then Brooke—well, he may be fairly prosperous, but he has only what he makes, you know ; and I doubt if he could settle very much upon his daughter, even if he wanted to. And he does not like me. I doubt whether even *you*, my dear Rosy, could dispose him to look favorably on my advances.”

Mrs. Romaine was perhaps convinced, but she did not like to own herself mistaken. She was silent for a minute or two, and then said with a sigh and a smile—

“You may be right. But it would have been splendid if you could have married Lesley Brooke. We should have been thorns in Lady Alice’s side ever afterwards.”

“You are one already, aren’t you ?” asked Oliver. He got up from the table and approached the mantelpiece as if to show that the discussion was ended. “No, my dear Rosalind,” he said, “I’m booked. I am going to woo and wed Miss Ethel Kenyon and her twenty thousand pounds. She will be sick of her fad for the stage in twelve months. And then we shall live very comfortably. But I’ll tell you what I will do to please you. I’ll *flirt* with this Lesley girl, nineteen to the dozen. I’ll make love to her : I’ll win her young affections, and do my best to break her heart, if you like. How would that suit you ?”

He spoke with a smile, but Rosalind knew that there was a ring of serious earnest in his voice.

“It sounds a very cold-blooded sort of thing to do,” she said.

“Please yourself. I won’t do it, then.”

“Oh, Oliver——”

“Yes, I know you would like to see Lady Alice’s daughter pining away for love of me,” said Oliver, with a little laugh. “It is not a bad idea. The difficulty will be to manage both girls—seriously, Rosalind, Ethel Kenyon is the girl I mean to marry.”

"You are clever enough for anything if you like."

"Thank you. Well, I'll see how far I can go."

"I must tell you, first, however," said Mrs. Romaine, with some hesitation, "that I told Lesley Brooke this afternoon that you were in love with Ethel. I had not thought of this plan, you see, Oliver."

"Ah, that complicates matters. Still, I think that we can manage—after a little reflection," said her brother, quietly. "Leave me to think it over, and I'll let you know what to do. And now I'm going out."

"Where?"

"Why should you ask? Do I generally tell you where I am going? Well, if you particularly want to know, I am going to the Novelty Theatre."

"To see Ethel act?"

"No—her part will be over by the time I get there. I shall probably see her home."

Mrs. Romaine made no remonstrance. If she thought her brother's conduct a trifle heartless, she did not venture to say so. She was sometimes considerably in awe of Oliver, although he was only a younger brother.

She went into the drawing-room rather slowly, watching him as he put on his hat and overcoat in the hall.

"There is one thing I meant to tell you to-night, but I forgot it until now," she said, pausing at the drawing-room door. "I am nearly sure that I saw Francis in the Square to-day."

Oliver turned round quickly. "The deuce you did! Did he see you?—did he try to speak to you?"

"No, but I think that he is lying in wait. You made me promise to tell you when I saw him next."

"Yes, indeed. I won't have him bothering you for money. If he wants money he had better come to me."

"Have you so much, Noll?"

He frowned and turned away. "At any rate he is not to annoy *you*," he said. "And I shall tell him so."

Mrs. Romaine made no objection. This ne'er-do-weel brother of hers—Francis by name—had always been a trouble and perplexity to her. He had been in the habit of appealing periodically to her for help, and she had seldom failed to respond to the appeal, although she believed that all the money she gave him went for gambling debt or drink; but lately Oliver had interfered. He had said that

Francis must henceforth apply to him and not to Rosalind if he wanted help, which sounded kind and brotherly enough ; but Rosalind had a vague suspicion that there was more than met the ear in this declaration. She fancied somehow that Oliver had secret and special reasons for preventing Francis' applications to her. But she knew very well that it was useless to ask questions or to make surmises respecting Oliver's motives and actions, unless he chose to show a readiness to make them clear to her. So she let him go out of the house without further remark.

As Oliver crossed the road, he noticed that a man was leaning against the iron railings of the green enclosure in the middle of the Square. The man's form was in shadow, but his face seemed to be turned to Mrs. Romaine's house. Oliver sedulously averted his eyes and hailed a passing hansom cab. He had no mind to be delayed just then, and he was almost certain that he recognized in that gaunt and shabby figure his disreputable brother. No, by-and-bye he would talk to Francis, he said to himself, but not to-night. He had other game in view on this particular evening in September.

The Novelty Theatre was just then occupied by a company that claimed to be the interpreters of a Scandinavian play-writer whose dramatic poems were just then the talk of London. Ethel Kenyon was playing a very minor part—a smaller *rôle*, indeed, than she was generally supposed to take, but one which she had accepted simply as an expression of her enthusiastic admiration for the author. Oliver knew the state of mind in which she generally came away from the representation of this play, and counted on her bright and elevated mood as a help to him in the course he meant to pursue.

He knew her habits as well as he knew her moods. For the last three years, ever since Rosalind had settled in London, and he had been able to cultivate Miss Kenyon's acquaintance, he had watched her blossom from a saucy, laughing girl into a very attractive woman. It was only during the past few months, however, that he had thought of her as his future wife—only since she had succeeded to that enticing legacy of twenty thousand pounds. Since then he had studied her more carefully than ever.

The Scandinavian writer's play was always over by a quarter to ten o'clock, and was succeeded by another in

which Ethel had no share. She never stayed longer than was necessary on these nights. She was generally ready to leave the theatre soon after ten o'clock with her companion, Mrs. Durant, who had the right of entry to her dressing-room, and generally acted as her dresser. Maurice Kenyon had refused to let his sister go upon the stage unless she was always most carefully chaperoned. Mrs. Durant was always at hand whenever Ethel went to the Novelty Theatre. And Oliver knew exactly what to expect when he took up his position—not for the first time—at the narrow little stage-door.

It was after ten o'clock, and the moon had risen in an almost cloudless sky. Even London looked beautiful beneath its light. Oliver cast a glance towards it and nodded as if in satisfaction. He did not care for the moon one jot; but he held a theory that women, being more romantic, were more likely to say "yes" to a wooer than "no," where they were wooed beneath a moonlit sky. The chances were all in his favor, he said to himself.

A cab was already waiting. Presently the door opened and a young lady in hood and cloak came out. The light fell on a delicate, piquante face, with a complexion of ivory fairness which cosmetics had not had time to destroy, with charming scarlet lips, long-lashed dark eyes, a dimpled chin, and a great quantity of curling dark hair—the kind of hair which will not lie straight, but twists itself into tight rings, and gets into apparently inextricable tangles, and looks pretty all the time. And this was Ethel Kenyon. Her companion, a woman of forty-five, staid and demure, followed close behind her, giving no sign of surprise when Oliver raised his hat and gently accosted the two ladies.

"Good-evening, Miss Kenyon. Good-evening, Mrs. Durant: I hope you notice what a lovely evening it is!"

"Indeed I do!" said Ethel, fervently. "Oh, how I wish I were in the country! I should like a long country walk."

"Would not a town walk do as well, for once?" asked Oliver, in his most persuasive tones. "I was wondering whether you would consent to let me see you home, as it is such a lovely night. But I see you have a cab——"

"I would rather drive, I must say," remarked Mrs. Durant. It was what she knew she was expected to say, and she was not sorry for it. "I am tired of being on my

feet so long. But if you would like to walk, Ethel, I dare say Mr. Trent would escort you."

"I should be only too pleased," said Oliver.

Ethel laughed happily. "All right, Mrs. Durant. You drive, and I'll walk home with Mr. Trent."

She scarcely waited for Oliver to offer his arm. She laid her hand in it so naturally, so securely, that even Oliver felt an impulse of pleasure. He looked down at the lovely, smiling creature at his side with admiration, even with tenderness.

At first they did not speak much, for they had to pass through some crowded and ill-smelling thoroughfares, where conversation was almost impossible. By-and-bye they emerged from these into Holborn, and thence they made their way into the wider streets and airier squares which abound in the West Central district. When they came in sight of the white pillars and paved yard of the British Museum, they were deep in talk on all sorts of matters—"Shakespeare and the musical glasses," as Oliver afterwards laughingly remarked. But he did not choose that she should altogether guide the course of conversation. Now and then he took the reins into his own hands. And it amused him to see how readily she allowed him to direct matters. She responded to the slightest hint, was attentive to the least check. Such quickness of apprehension, he argued, meant only one thing in a woman: not intellectual faculty, but love.

"And you still like the stage?" he said to her, after a time.

"I like it immensely. I can express myself there as I could in no other sphere of life. People used to advise me to take to recitations: how glad I am that I stood out for what I liked best."

"What one likes best is not always the safest path."

"You might as well say it is not always the easiest path! Mine is a very hard life, so far as work is concerned, you know. I toil early and late. But how can you be so awfully trite, Mr. Trent? I did not expect it of you."

"A good deal of life is rather trite," said Oliver. "I know only one thing that can preserve it from commonplaceness and dullness and dreariness."

"And that is——"

"Love."

A little silence fell on both of them. Oliver's voice had sunk almost to a whisper : Ethel's cheeks had grown suddenly very hot.

"Love makes everything easy and beautiful. Does not your poet say so—the man whose play you have acted in to-night? Ethel, why don't you try the experiment?—the experiment of loving?"

"I do try it," she said, laughing, and trying to regain her lost lightness of tone. "I love Maurice and Mrs. Durrant and hosts of people."

"Add one more to the list," said Oliver. "Love *me*."

"You?" she said, doubtingly. "I am not sure whether you are a person to be loved."

"Oh, yes, I am. Seriously, Ethel, may I speak to your brother? May I hope that you can love me a little, and that you will some day be my wife?"

"Oh, that is *very* serious!" she said, mockingly. And she withdrew her fingers from his arm. "I did not bargain for so much solemnity when I set out with you from the theatre to-night."

"But I set out, Ethel, with the intention of asking you to be my wife. Come, my darling, won't you give me an answer? Don't send me away disconsolate! Let me teach you what love means—love and happiness!"

His voice sank once more to its lowest murmur. Ethel listened, hesitated, smiled. Her little fingers found their way back to his arm again, and were instantly caught and pressed, and even kissed, when they came to a dark and shady place. And before he parted with her at the door of her brother's house, he had put his arms round her and kissed her on the lips.

Was it all pretence—all for the sake of those twenty thousand pounds of hers? Oliver swore to himself that it was not. She was such a pretty little thing—such a dear, loving little girl, in spite of her fun and merriment and spirit—one could not help feeling fond of her. Not that he was going to acknowledge himself capable of such a weakness when he next talked to Rosalind.

He was strolling idly along the east side of Russell Square as these thoughts passed through his mind. He had completely forgotten the stroller whom he had seen leaning against the railings of the Square gardens; but he was unpleasantly reminded of that gentleman's existence

when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a voice said in his ear—

“ I’ve been waiting here six hours, Oliver, and I must have a word or two with you.”



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE ELDER BROTHER.

OLIVER turned round sharply, with an air of visible impatience. He knew the voice well enough, and the moonlight left him no doubt as to the lineaments of a face with which he was quite familiar. Francis Trent was not unlike either Rosalind or Oliver ; but of the two he resembled his sister rather than his younger brother. True, he did not possess her beauty, but he had her sleepy eyes, her type of feature, her colorless skin, and jetty hair. The colorlessness had degenerated, however, into an unhealthy pallor, and the stubbly beard which covered his cheeks and chin did not improve his appearance. Besides he was terribly out at elbows ; his coat was green with age, his boots were broken, and his cuffs frayed and soiled. His hat was unnaturally shiny, and dented in two or three places. Altogether he looked as unlike a brother of the immaculate Oliver and the exquisitely-dressed Rosalind as could possibly have been found for either in the world of London.

Oliver surveyed him with polite disgust, and waved him back a little.

"You have been drinking coarse brandy, Francis," he said, coolly ; "and you have been smoking bad tobacco. I wish you would consult my susceptibilities on those points when you come to interview me. You would really find it pleasanter in the end."

"Where am I to find the money to consult your susceptibilities with?" asked the man, with a burst of what seemed like very genuine feeling. "Will you provide me with it? If you don't, what remains for me but to brink British brandy and smoke strong shag? I must drink something—I must smoke something. Will you pay the piper if I go to more expense?"

"Not if you talk so loudly as to attract the attention of every passing policeman," said Oliver, dryly. "If you

want to talk to me, as you say you do, keep quiet please."

Francis Trent growled something like an imprecation on his brother below his breath, and then went on in a lowered tone.

"It's easy for you to talk. You are not saddled by a wife and a lot of debts. *You* haven't to keep out of the way for fear you should be wanted by the police—although you have not been very particular about keeping your hands clean after all. But you've been the lucky dog and I the unlucky one, and this is the result."

"If you are going to be abusive, my good friend," said Oliver, calmly, "I shall turn round and go home again. If you will keep a civil tongue in your head I don't mind listening to you for five minutes. What have you got to say?"

The man was evidently in a state of only half-repressed irritation. His brows twitched, he gnawed savagely at his beard, he looked at Oliver with furtive hate from under his heavy dark brows. But the younger man's cool tones seemed to possess the power of keeping him in check. He made a visible effort to calm himself as he replied,

"You needn't be so down on me, Oliver. You must allow for a fellow's feeling a little out of sorts when he's kept waiting about here for hours. I am convinced that Rosalind saw me this afternoon; I'm certain that you saw me to-night. If I had not caught you now I would have gone to the front door and hammered at it till one of you came out."

"And you think that you would have advanced your cause thereby?"

"Why, hang it all, Oliver, one would think that I was not your own flesh and blood! Have you no natural affection left?"

"Not much. Natural affection is a mistake. You need not count on that with me."

"You always were a cold-blooded, half-hearted sort of a fellow. Not one to help a friend, or even a brother," said Francis, sullenly.

"Suppose you come to the point," remarked Oliver. "It is getting on to eleven o'clock. I really can't stand here all night."

"It is nothing to you that I have stood here for hours already."

"No, it is not." There was a touch of sharpness in his tone. "I am in no mood for sentiment. Say what you have to say and get done with it, or I shall leave you."

"Well," said Francis, after a pause, in which he was perhaps estimating his own powers of persuasion against his brother's powers of resistance, and coming to the conclusion that it was not worth his while to contend with him any longer, "I have come to say this. I am hard up—devilish hard up. But that's not all. It is not enough to offer me a five-pound note or a ten-pound note and tell me to spend it as I please. I want something definite. You seem to have plenty of money: I have none. I want an allowance, or else a sum of money down, sufficient to take Mary and myself to the Colonies. I don't think that is much to ask."

"Don't you?"

The icy tone which Oliver assumed exasperated his brother.

"No, be hanged if I think it is!" he said vehemently, though still in lowered tones. "I want two hundred a year—it's little enough: or two or three thousand on the nail. Give me that, and I'll not trouble you or Rosy any more."

"And where do you suppose that I'm to get two or three thousand pounds, or two hundred a year?"

"I don't care where you get it, so long as you hand it over to me."

"Very sorry I can't oblige you," said Oliver, nonchalantly; "but as your proposition is a perfect impossibility, I don't see my way to saying anything else."

"You think I don't mean it, do you?" growled his brother. "I tell you that I will have it. And if I don't have it I'll not hold my tongue any longer. I'll ruin you."

"Don't talk in that melodramatic way," said Oliver, quietly. But his lip twitched a little as if something had touched him unpleasantly. "You know very well that you have no more power of ruining me than you have of flying to yonder moon. You can't substantiate any of your stories. You can blacken me in the eyes of a few persons who know me, perhaps; but really I doubt your power of doing that. People wouldn't believe you, you know; and they would believe me. There is so much moral power in a good hat and patent leather boots."

"Do you dare to trifle with me——" the man was beginning, furiously, but Oliver checked him with a slight pressure on his arm, and went on suavely.

"All this threatening sort of business is out of date, as you ought to know. One would think that you had been to the Surrey-side Theatres, lately, or the Porte St. Martin, and taken lessons of a stage villain. 'Beware ! I will be revenged,' and all that sort of thing. It doesn't go down now, you know. The fact is this—you can't do me any harm, you can only harm yourself ; and I think you had better be advised by me and hold your tongue."

Francis was silent for a minute or two. He was evidently impressed by Oliver's manner.

"You're right in one way," he said, in a much more subdued tone. "People wouldn't listen to me because I am so badly dressed—I look so poor. But that could be remedied. A new suit of clothes might make all the difference, Oliver. And then we could see whether *some* people would believe me or not !"

"And what difference will it make to me if people did believe you ?" said Oliver, slowly.

The man stared at him open-mouthed. Oliver was taking a view of things which was unknown to Francis.

"Well," he answered, "considering that you and most of my relations and friends have cut me for the last ten years because I got into trouble over a few accounts at the bank—and considering the sorry figure I cut now in consequence—I don't know why you should be so careless of the possibility of partaking my downfall ! I should say that it would be rather worse for you than it has been for me ; and it hasn't been very nice for *me*, I can assure you !"

Oliver's face grew a trifle paler, but his voice was as smooth as ever when he began to speak.

"Now, look here, Francis," he said, "I'll be open and plain with you. Of course, I know what you are alluding to ; it would be weakness to pretend that I did not. But I assure you that you are on the wrong track. In your case you were found to have embezzled money, falsified accounts, and played the devil with old Lawson's affairs generally. You were prosecuted for it, and the whole case was in the papers. You got off on some technical point, but everybody knew that you were guilty, and everybody

cut you dead—except, you will remember, your brother and sister, who continued to give you money, and were exceedingly kind to you. You were publicly disgraced, and there was no way of hushing the matter up at all. I am sorry to be obliged to put things so disagreeably——”

“Go on! You needn’t apologize,” said Francis, with a rather husky laugh. “I know it all as well as you do. Go on.”

“I wish to point out the difference between our positions,” said Oliver, calmly. “I did something a little shady myself, when I was a lad of twenty—at your instigation, mind; I signed old Romaine’s name in the wrong place, didn’t I? Old Romaine found it out, kept the thing quiet, and said that he had given me the money. I expressed my regret, and the matter blew over. What can you make out of that story?”

He spoke very quietly, but there was a watchfulness in his eye, a slight twitching of his nostril, which proved him to be not entirely at his ease. His elder brother laughed aloud.

“If that were all!” he said. “But you forget how base the action would seem if all the circumstances were known! how black the treachery and ingratitude to a man who was, after all, your benefactor. Rosalind never knew of that little episode, I believe? And she has a good deal of respect for her husband’s memory. I should like to see what she would say about it.”

“She would not believe you, my dear boy.”

“But if I could prove it? If I had in my possession a full confession signed by yourself—the confession that Romaine insisted on, you will remember? What effect would that have upon her mind? And there was that other business, you know, about Mary’s sister, whom you lured away from her home and ruined. *She* is dead, but Mary is alive and can bear witness against you. How would you like these facts blazoned abroad and brought home to the mind of the pretty girl whom I saw you kissing a little while ago on the steps of a house in Upper Woburn Place? She is a Miss Kenyon, I know: an actress; I have heard all about her. Her brother is a doctor; and she has twenty thousand pounds in her own right.”

“You do seem, indeed, to know everything,” said Oliver, with a sneer.

"I make it my business to know everything about you. You've been so confoundedly mean of late that I had begun to understand that I must put the screw on you. And I warn you, if you don't give me what I ask, or promise to do so within a reasonable time, I shall first go to Rosalind, and then to these Kenyon people, and Caspar Brooke, and all these other friends of yours, and see what they will give me for your secrets."

"They'll kick you out of the house, and you'll be called a fool for your pains," said the younger man, furiously.

"No, I don't think so. Not if I play my game properly. You are engaged to Miss Kenyon, are you not?"

Oliver stood silent.

"I tell you that she shall never marry you in ignorance of your past unless you shut my mouth first. And you are the best judge of whether she will marry you at all or not, when she knows what we know."

Then the two brothers were both silent for a little while. Oliver stood frowning, tracing a pattern on the pavement with the toe of his polished boot, and gazing at it. He was evidently considering the situation. Francis stood with his back to the railings, his eyes fixed, with a somewhat crafty look, upon his brother's face. He was not yet sure that his long-cherished scheme for extracting money from Oliver would succeed. He believed that it would; but there was never any counting upon Oliver. Astute as Francis considered himself (in spite of his failure in the world), Oliver was astuter still.

Presently Oliver looked up and met Francis' fixed gaze. He started a little, and made an odd grimace, intended to conceal a nervous twitch of the muscles of his face. Then he spoke.

"You think yourself very clever, no doubt, Well, perhaps you are. I'll acknowledge that, in a certain sense, you might spoil my game for me. Not quite in the way you think, you know; but up to a certain point. As I don't want to have my game spoilt, I am willing to make a bargain with you—is that plain?"

"Fair sailing, so far," said Francis, doggedly. "Go on. What will you give?"

"Nothing just now. The sum you named on the day when I marry Ethel Kenyon, on condition that you give me back that confession you talk about, swear not to mention your wife's sister, and take yourself off to Australia."

"Hm!" said Francis considering. "So I have brought you to terms, have I?" So much the better for you—and perhaps for me. Are you engaged to Miss Kenyon?"

"I asked her to-night to marry me, and she consented."

"You always were a lucky dog, Oliver," said Francis, with almost a wistful expression on his crafty face. "I never could see how you managed it, for my part. If that pretty girl"—with a laugh—"knew all that I knew——"

"Exactly. I don't want her to know all you do. Are you going to agree to my terms or not?"

"I should have said they were *my* terms," said the elder brother, "but we won't haggle about names. Say two thousand five hundred pounds down."

"No, two thousand," said Oliver, boldly. "That will suit me better than two hundred a year."

"Ah, you want to get rid of me, don't you? How soon is it likely to be?"

"Oh, that I can't tell you. As soon as she fixes the day."

"I swear by all that I hold sacred," said Francis, with sudden energy, "that I won't wait more than six months, and then I'll take two thousand."

"Six? Make it twelve. The girl may want a year's freedom."

"I won't wait twelve. I swear I won't. I'm tired of this life. I can't get any work to do, though I've tried over and over again. And I'm always unlucky at play. There's Mary threatening to go out to work again. If we were in another country, with a clear start, she should not have to do that."

Oliver meditated. It did not seem to him likely that Ethel would refuse to marry him in six months' time, but of course it was possible. Still he was pretty sure that he could get the money advanced as soon as his engagement was noised abroad. It was rather a pity that he would have to publish it so soon—especially when his projects respecting Lesley Brooke had not been carried out—but it could not be helped. The prospect of ridding himself of his brother Francis was most welcome to him. And—if he could quiet him by promises, it might perhaps not be necessary to pay him the money after all.

"Well," he said, at last, "I promise it within six months, Francis. On the conditions I named, of course."

"And you will keep your word?" said Francis, looking suspiciously into his brother's smooth, pale face.

"If not," answered Oliver, airily, "you have the remedy in your own hands, you know. You can easily bring me to book. And now that this interesting conversation is ended, perhaps you will kindly allow me to go home? The night is fine, but I am a good deal chilled with standing——"

"And what am I, then? I've been waiting for you, off and on, for hours. And I haven't got a shilling in my pocket, either. Haven't you got a pound or two to spare, Oliver? For the sake of old times, you know."

Some men would have found it pitiful to hear poor Francis Trent, with his broken-down, cringing, crafty look, thus suing for a sovereign. For he had the air of a ruined gentleman, not of an ordinary beggar, and the signs of refinement in his face and bearing made his state of abasement and destitution more apparent. But Oliver was not touched by any such sentimental considerations. He looked at first as if he were about to refuse his brother's request; but policy dictated another course. He must not drive to desperation the man in whose hands lay his character and perhaps his future fortune. He put his hand into his pocket, brought out a couple of sovereigns, and dropped them into Francis' greedily outstretched palm. Then he crossed the road towards his sister's house, while the elder brother slunk away with an air of anything but triumph. It was sad to see him so depressed, so broken-spirited, so hopeless. For he had been meant for better things. But his will was weak, his principles had never been settled, and with his first lapse from honesty all self-respect seemed to leave him. Thenceforth he went down hill, and would long ago have reached the bottom but for the one helping hand that had been held out to stay him in his mad career. That hand belonged to none of his kith and kin, however. It was seamed and roughened and reddened by honest toil; but the toil had at least been honest and the toiler's love for the fine gentleman for whom she worked was loving and sincere. To cut a long story short, Francis Trent had married a dressmaker of the lower grade, and a dressmaker, moreover, who had once been a ladies'-maid.

While he slouched away to his poverty-stricken home, and Oliver solaced himself with a novel and a cigar, and



Miss Ethel Kenyon sank to sleep in spite of a tumult of innocent delight which would have kept a person of less healthy mind and body wide awake for hours, Lesley Brooke, who was to influence the fate of all these three, lay upon her bed bemoaning her loneliness of heart, and saying to herself that she should never be happy in her father's house. It was not that she had met with any positive unkindness: she could accuse nobody of wishing to be rude or cold, but the atmosphere was not one to which she was accustomed, and it gave her considerable discomfort. Even the Mrs. Romaine of whom her father spoke as if she would be a friend, was not very congenial to her. Rosalind's eyes remained cold, despite their softness, and Lesley was vaguely conscious of a repulsion—such as we sometimes feel on touching a toad or a snake—when Mrs. Romaine put her hand on the girl's listless fingers. No, what it was Lesley could not tell, but she was sure of this, that she could never like Mrs. Romaine.

And she cried herself to sleep, and dreamed of the convent and the sunny skies of France.

## CHAPTER X.

## KNIGHT-ERRANTRY.

LESLEY found that she had unintentionally given great offence to Sarah, who was a supreme authority in her father's house, and possibly to her aunt as well, by the arrangement with her father that she would have a maid of her own. In vain she protested that she did not need one, and had not really asked for one; the impression remained upon Miss Brooke's mind and Sarah's mind that she had in some way complained of the treatment which she had received, and they were a little prejudiced against her in consequence.

Miss Brooke was a good woman, and, to some extent, a just woman; but it was scarcely possible for her to judge Lesley correctly. All Miss Brooke's traditions favored the cult of the woman who worked: and Lesley, like her mother before her, had the look of a tall, fair lily—one of those who toil not, neither do they spin. Miss Brooke was quite too liberal-minded to have any great prejudice against a girl because she had been educated in a French convent, though naturally she thought it the worst place of training that could have been secured for her; and she had made up her mind at once, when she saw Lesley, that although there might be "no great harm" in the poor child, she was probably as frivolous, as shallow-hearted, and as ignorant as the ordinary French school-girl was supposed to be.

With Sarah the case was different. Sarah was an ardent Protestant, of a strict Calvinist type, and she had taken up the impression that Miss Lesley must needs be a Romanist. Now this was not the case, for Lesley had always been allowed to go to her own church, see her own clergyman, and hold aloof from the devotional exercises prescribed for the other girls. But Sarah believed firmly that she belonged to the Church of Rome, and she did not feel at all easy in her mind at staying under the same roof with

her. She made this remark to Miss Brooke on the third day after Lesley's arrival, and was offended at the burst of laughter with which Miss Brooke received it.

"Do you think the house will fall in, Sarah? or that you will be corrupted?"

"I think I may hold myself safe, ma'am," said Sarah, with dignity. "But I'm not so sure about the house."

She stood with her arms folded, grimly surveying her mistress, who, if the truth must be told, was lying on a sofa in her bedroom, smoking a cigarette. Sarah knew her mistress' tastes, and had grown generally tolerant of them, but she still looked on the cigarettes with disapproval. Miss Brooke was discreet enough to smoke only in her own room or in her brother's study—a fact which had mollified Sarah a little when her mistress first began the practice.

"The minute you smoke one o' them nasty things in the street, ma'am, I shall give notice," she had said.

And Miss Brooke had quietly answered: "Very well, Sarah, we'll wait till then."

It must be added, for the benefit of all who are shocked by Miss Brooke's practice, that she had begun it by order of a doctor as a cure for neuralgia. She continued it because she liked it. Lesley was only just beginning to suspect her aunt of the habit, and was inexpressibly startled and alarmed at the thought of such a thing. That her aunt, who was indisputably kind, clever, benevolent, respectable in every way, should smoke cigarettes, seemed to Lesley to justify all that she had heard against her father's Bohemian household. She could not get over it. Sarah *had* got over this outrage on conventionality, but she was not yet prepared to forgive Lesley for having lived in a French convent.

"Oh, you're not sure about the house," said Miss Brooke. "Well, I'm sorry for you, Sarah. I'll send in a plumber if you think that would be any good."

"No, ma'am, don't; but if it will not ill-convenience you I should like to put a few tracts in Miss Lesley's room, so that she may look at them sometimes instead of the little book of Popish prayers that she has brought with her."

Miss Brooke wondered for a moment what the book of Popish prayers could be; and then remembered a little

Russia-bound book—the well-known “Imitation of Christ” which she had noticed in Lesley’s room, and which Sarah had doubtless mistaken for a book of prayer. It would not have been at all like Miss Brooke to clear up the mistake. She generally let mistakes clear themselves. She only gave one of her short, clear, rather hard laughs, and told Sarah to put as many tracts as she pleased in Lesley’s room. Whereon, Lesley shortly afterwards found a bundle of these publications in her room, and, as she rather disliked their tone and tendency, she requested Sarah to take them away.

“They were put there for you to read,” said Sarah, with stolid displeasure.

“By my aunt?”

“Your aunt knew that I was going to put them there. And it would be better for you to sit and read them rather than them rubbishy books you gets out of master’s libery. Your poor, perishing soul ought to be looked after as well as your body.”

“Take them away, please,” said Lesley, wearily. “I do not want to read them: I am not accustomed to that sort of book.” Then, the innate sweetness of her nature gaining the day, she added, “Please do not be angry with me, Sarah. I would read them if I thought that they would do me any good, but I am afraid they will not.”

“Just like your mother,” Sarah said, sharply. “She wouldn’t touch ‘em with the tips of her fingers, neither. And a maid, and all that nonsense. And dresses from France. Deary me, this is a sad upsetting for poor master.”

“I don’t interfere with your master,” said Lesley, somewhat bitterly. “He does not trouble about me—and I don’t see why I should trouble about him.”

She said it almost below her breath, not thinking that Sarah would hear or understand; but Sarah—after flouncing out of the room with an indignant “Well, I’m sure!”—went straight to Miss Brooke and repeated every word, with a few embellishments of her own. Miss Brooke came to the conclusion that Lesley was, first of all, very indiscreet to take servants so much into her confidence, and, secondly, that she was inclined to rebel against her father’s authority. And it seemed good to her to take counsel with Mrs. Romaine in this emergency; and Mrs. Romaine soon found an opportunity of pouring a sugared, poisoned version of what she had heard into Caspar Brooke’s too

credulous ears. So that he became colder than ever in his manner to Lesley, and Lesley wondered vainly how she could have offended him.

The sole comfort that she gleaned at this time came from the Kenyons. Ethel called on her, and won her heart at once by a peculiarly caressing winsomeness that reminded one of some tropical bird—all dainty coquetties and shy, sweet playfulness. Not that Ethel was in the least bit shy, in reality ; but she had a very tiny touch of the stage habit of *posing*, and with strangers she invariably posed as being a little shy. But in spite of this innocent little affectation, and in spite of a very fashionable style of dress and demeanor, Ethel was true-hearted and affectionate, and Lesley's own heart warmed to the tenderness of Ethel's nature before she had been in her company half an hour.

"You know you are not a bit like what I expected you to be," Ethel said sagely, when the two girls had talked together for some little time.

"What did you expect?" said Lesley, her face aglow

"I hardly know—something more French, I think—a girl with airs and graces," said Ethel, who had herself more airs and graces than Lesley had ever donned in all her life ; "nothing so Puritan as you are !"

"Puritan, after so many years of a French convent?"

"Yes, Puritan : no word suits you half so well ! There is a sort of restrained life and gladness about you, and it is the restraint that gives it its attraction ! Oh, forgive me for speaking so frankly ; but when I see you I forget that I have not known you for years and years ! I feel somehow as if we had been friends all our life !"

"And so do I," said Lesley, surrendering herself to the spell, and letting Ethel take both her hands and look into her face. "But you are not at all like the English girls I expected to meet ! I thought they were all cold and stiff !"

"Have you never seen an English girl before, dear?"

"Yes, but I have had no English girl friend. I never talked to an English girl before as I am talking to you."

"Oh, how charming !" said Ethel. "And I never before talked to a girl who had lived in a convent ! We are each a new experience to the other ! What a basis for friendship !"

"Do you think so?" said Lesley. "I should have thought the opposite—that what is old and well-tried and established is the best to found a friendship upon."

She spoke **half sadly**, with a memory of her parents and her own relations with **her father** in her mind. Ethel gave her a shrewd glance, but made **no direct reply**. She was a young woman of marvellously quick intuitions, and she saw at once that Lesley's training had not fitted her to take up her position in the Brooke household very easily.

When she went home she turned this matter over in her mind a good many times; and was so absorbed in her reflections that her brother had to ask her twice what she was thinking about before she answered him.

"I was thinking about Lesley Brooke," she answered promptly.

"A lively subject. I never saw a girl with a more melancholy expression."

"Well, of course, as yet she hates everything," said Ethel, comprehensively.

"Hates everything! That's a large order," said the young doctor.

They were at dinner—they dined at six every day on account of Ethel's professional engagements; and it was not often that Maurice was at home. When he was at home Ethel knew that he liked to talk to her, so she abandoned her brown studies.

"Well, she hates the fog and the darkness, and the ugly buildings and the solid furniture of Mr. Brooke's house, which dates back to the Georgian era at the very least. I'm sure she hates Sarah. And I shouldn't like to say that she hates Doctor Sophy"—Ethel always called Miss Brooke Doctor Sophy—"but she doesn't like her very much. She is awfully shocked because Doctor Sophy smokes cigarettes."

"Quite right of Miss Lesley Brooke to be shocked," said Maurice, laughing. "However, she need not despair, there is always old Caspar to fall back upon."

Ethel pursed up her lips, looked at her brother very hard, and shook her curly head significantly.

"Do you mean to say," cried the doctor, "that she doesn't appreciate her father?"

"I don't think she understands him. And how can she appreciate him if she doesn't understand?"

Maurice laid down his knife and fork, and simply glared at his sister. He was an excitable young man, and had a way of expressing himself sometimes in reprehensibly strong language. On this occasion, he said—

"Do you mean to tell me that that girl is such a born idiot and fool that she can't see what a grand man her father is?"

Ethel nodded. But her eyes brimmed over with mirth.

"Then she deserves to be shut up for life in the convent she came from!" said the doctor. "I wouldn't have believed it! Is she blind? Doesn't she *see* what an intellect that man has? Can't she understand that his abilities are equal to those of any man in Europe?"

"We all know your admiration for Mr. Brooke, dear," said Ethel, saucily. "You had better go and expound your views to Lesley. Perhaps she and her father would get on better then."

Maurice was silent. He sat and looked aghast at the notion thus presented to him. That Caspar Brooke—his friend, his mentor, almost his hero—should not have been able to live with his wife was bad enough! That his daughter should not admire him seemed to Maurice a sort of profanation! Heavens, what did the girl mean? The mother might have been an aristocratic fool; but the girl?—she looked intelligent enough! There must be a misapprehension somewhere; and it occurred to Maurice that it might be his duty to remove it.

Maurice Kenyon was a born knight-errant. When he said that a thing wanted doing, his heart ached until he could do it. A Celtic strain of blood in him showed itself in the heat of his belief, the impetuosity of his actions. In Ethel this strain had taken an artistic turn; but the same nature that urged her to dramatic representation urged her brother to set to work vehemently on righting anything that he thought was wrong. There never was a man who hated more than he to leave a matter *in statu quo*.

Although Ethel said no more concerning Lesley's misunderstanding of her father, Maurice was haunted by the echo of her remarks. He could not conceive how a girl possessed of ordinary faculties could possibly misprize her father's gifts. Either she was a girl of extraordinary stupidity, or she was wilfully blind. Perhaps there was no one to point out to her Caspar Brooke's many virtues. But they (thought Maurice) lay on the surface, and could not possibly be overlooked. The girl must have been spoiled by her residence in a French convent: she must be either stupid, frivolous, or base. Then how could Ethel care for

her? Surely she could not be stupid: she could not be base—she might be frivolous: Maurice could not go so far as to think that his sister Ethel would like her the worse for being a little frivolous. Yes, that must be it: she was frivolous—a soulless butterfly, who pined for the gaieties of Paris. How awfully hard for a man like Caspar Brooke to have a daughter who was merely frivolous.

The more he thought of it—and he thought a good deal of it—the more Mr. Kenyon was concerned. No doubt it was no business of his, he said to himself, and he was a fool to worry himself. But then Brooke was his friend, in spite of the disparity of their years; and he did not like to think that his friend had such a heavy burden to bear. For, of course, it was a heavy burden to a man like Brooke. No doubt Brooke did not show that it was a burden: strong men did not cry out when their strength was tried. But a man with his power of affection, his tenderness, his depth of feeling (as Maurice thought), must be troubled when he found that his daughter neither loved nor comprehended him!

Maurice reflected that he had seen this extraordinary girl once. She had been standing at the window one day when he and Ethel were feeding that pampered poodle of Ethel's, Scaramouch, and he had been struck by the grace of her figure, the queenly pose of her head. He had not observed her face particularly, but he believed that it was rather pretty. Her dress—for his practised memory began to furnish him with details—her dress was grey, and if he could judge aright, fashionably made. Yes, a little French fashion-plate—a doll, powdered, perhaps, and painted, laced up, and perfumed and clothed in dainty raiment, to come and make discord in her father's home! It was intolerable. Why did not Brooke leave this pestilent creature in her own abode, with the insolent, aristocratic friends who had done their best already to spoil his life!

Thus he worked himself up to a high pitch of passionate excitement on his friend's behalf. It never occurred to him that Caspar Brooke might not at all be in need of it. It did not seem possible to him that a father could feel indifferent to the opinion of his child. And perhaps he was right, and Caspar Brooke not quite so indifferent as he seemed.

It must be the girl's fault, Maurice thought to himself. Could nothing be done? Could he set Ethel to talk to



her? But no: Ethel was not serious enough in her appreciation of Caspar Brooke. Mrs. Romaine? She would praise Mr. Brooke, no doubt; but Kenyon had a troubled doubt of Mrs. Romaine's motives.

Doctor Sophy? Well, he liked Doctor Sophy immensely, especially since she had given up her practice: he liked her because she was so frank, so sensible, so practical in her dealings. But she was not a very sympathetic sort of person: not the kind of person, he acknowledged to himself, who would be likely to inspire a young girl with enthusiasm for another.

If there was nobody else to perform a needed office, it was your plain duty to perform it yourself. That had been Maurice Kenyon's motto for many years. It recurred to him now with rather disagreeable force.

Why, of course, *he* could not go and tell Brooke's daughter that she was a frivolous fool! What was his conscience driving at, he wondered. How could he, who did not know her in the least, commit such an act of impertinence as tell her how much he disapproved of her? It would be the act of a prig, not of a gentleman.

Of course he could not do it. And then he began at the beginning again, and condoled with Brooke in his own heart, and vituperated Brooke's daughter, and wondered whether she was really incapable of being reclaimed to the paths of filial reverence, and whether he ought not to make an attempt in his friend's favor. All of which proves that if any man deserved the name of a Don Quixote, that man was Maurice Kenyon, M.R.C.S.

Ethel unconsciously gave him the chance he secretly desired. He wanted above all things to make Lesley's acquaintance, and to talk to her—for her good—about her father. And one afternoon his sister begged him, as a great favor to her, to go over to Mr. Brooke's house with a message and a parcel for Lesley. He had been introduced to her one day in the street, therefore there could be nothing strange in his going in and asking for her, Ethel said. And would he please go about four o'clock, so as to catch Miss Lesley Brooke at afternoon tea.

Maurice told himself that it would be an impertinent thing to speak to her about her family affairs, and that he would only stay three minutes. At four o'clock he knocked at the door of Mr. Brooke's chocolate-brown house, and inquired solemnly for Miss Brooke.

Miss Brooke was not at home.

“Miss Lesley Brooke then?”

Miss Lesley Brooke was in the drawing-room. Maurice went upstairs.

## CHAPTER XI.

## BROOKE'S DISCIPLE.

LESLEY was sitting in a low chair near a small wood fire, which the chillness of the October day made fully acceptable. She had a book on her lap, but she did not look as if she were reading: her chin was supported by her hand, and her brown eyes were gazing out of the window, with, as Maurice Kenyon could not fail to see, a slightly blank and saddened look. The girl had been now a fortnight in London, and her face had paled and thinned since her arrival; there was an anxious fold between her brows, and her mouth drooped at the corners. If her old friends—Sister Rose of the convent, for instance—had seen her, they could hardly have recognized this spiritless, brooding maiden for the joyous “Lisa” of their thoughts.

Mr. Kenyon had only one moment in which to note the significance of her attitude, for Lesley changed it as soon as she heard his name. He gave her Ethel’s message at once and Ethel’s parcel, and then stood, a little confused and unready for she had risen and was looking as if, when his errand was accomplished, he ought to go. Fortunately, Doctor Sophy came in and invited him cordially to sit down; rang for tea and scolded him roundly for not coming oftener; then suddenly remembered that one of her everlasting committees was at that moment sitting in a neighboring house, and started off at once to join her fellows, calling out to Lesley as she went to give Mr. Kenyon some tea, and tell her father, who was in the library.

“My father is out: Aunt Sophy does not know that,” said Lesley to her visitor.

“Then I ought to go?” said Maurice, smiling.

“Oh, no!”—Lesley looked disturbed. “I did not mean to be so inhospitable. The tea is just coming up.”

“Thank you,” said Maurice, accepting the unspoken invitation and seating himself. “I shall be very glad of a cup.”

She sat down too, veiling the real embarrassment of a school-girl by an assumption of great dignity. Maurice looked at her and felt perplexed. Somehow he could not believe that Brooke's daughter was such a very frivolous girl when he came to look at her. She had a fine brow, expressive eyes, a very eloquent mouth. He wondered what she was reading. Glancing at the title of the book, his heart sank within him. She had a yellow-backed novel in her hand, of a profoundly light and frivolous type. Maurice was fond of certain kinds of novels, but there were others that he disliked and despised, and, as it happened, Lesley had got hold of one of these.

"You are reading?" he said. "Am I interrupting you very much?"

"Oh, no," Lesley answered, smiling and shutting the book. "Tea is coming up, you see. I am falling into English habits, and beginning to love the hour of tea."

Sarah brought in the tea-tray as she spoke; and even Sarah's sour visage relaxed a little at the sight of the young doctor. She went downstairs, and presently returned with a plate of small, sweet cakes, which she placed rather ostentatiously upon the table.

"Sarah must have brought those cakes especially for me," said Mr. Kenyon lightly, when she had left the room. "She knows they are my especial favorites. And your father's too. I don't know how many dozen your father and I have not eaten with our coffee sometimes in an evening! I suppose you are learning to like them for his sake!"

He was talking against time for the sake of giving her back the confidence that she seemed to have lost, for her face had flushed and paled again more than once since his entry. But perhaps he was wrong, for she answered him with a quietness of tone which showed no perturbation.

"These little macaroon things, you mean? I like them very much already. I did not know that my father cared about them. I have been away so long"—smilingly—"that I know but little of his tastes."

"I could envy you the pleasure you will have, then?" said Maurice, quickly.

Lesley opened her brown eyes. "The—the pleasure?" she faltered in an inquiring tone.

"Yes, the pleasure of discovering what are the tastes and feelings of a man like your father," said Maurice.

Then, as she looked disconcerted still, and as if she did not know quite what he meant, he went on, ardently :

"You have the privilege, you know, of being the only daughter of a man who is not only very widely known, but very much respected and admired. That doesn't seem much to you perhaps?"—for he thought he saw Lesley's lip curl, and his tone became a little sharp. "I assure you it means a great deal in a world like ours—in the world of London. It means that your father is a man of great ability and of unimpeachable honesty—I mean honesty of thought, honesty of purpose—intellectual honesty. You have no idea how rare that quality is amongst public men—or literary men—or journalists. Indeed it is a wonder that Brooke is so successful as he is, considering that he never wrote or said a word that he did not mean. No doubt that seems a small thing to you: it is not a small thing to say of a journalist now-a-days."

"I don't know much about journalists," said Lesley. "But all that you are saying would be taken as a matter of course amongst *gentlemen*."

There was a snub for Maurice, and a sly hit at her father, too. Maurice began to wax warm.

"Miss Brooke," he said, "you entirely fail to understand me; and I can imagine that you, perhaps, fail to understand your father also."

"If I do," said Lesley, proudly, "I hardly need to be set right by a stranger."

The young doctor sprang to his feet. "I a stranger!" he said. "I, who have known and appreciated and worked with Caspar Brooke for the last half dozen years—I to be called a stranger by his daughter? I don't think that's fair: I don't indeed."

He paused and put his tea-cup down upon the table. "If you'll only think for a minute, Miss Brooke," he said, entreatingly, with such a sudden softening of voice and manner that Lesley sat amazed, "I cannot believe but that you'll pardon me. I owe so much to your father—he has been a guide, a helper, almost a prophet to me, ever since I came across him when I was a medical student at King's College Hospital, and I only want everybody to see him with my eyes—loving and reverent eyes, I can tell

you, though I wouldn't say so to everybody, seeing that love and reverence seem to have gone out of fashion ! But to his daughter——"

"His daughter surely does not need to be taught how to think of him by another, whether he be an old friend or a comparative stranger," said Lesley. "She can learn to know him for herself."

"But *can* she?"—Maurice Kenyon's Irish strain, which always led him to be more eager and explicit in speech than if he had been entirely of Anglo-Saxon nationality, was running away with him. "Are you sure that she can? Look here, Miss Brooke : you come to your father's house straight from a French convent, I believe. What *can* you know of English life? of the strife of political parties, of literary parties, of faiths and theories and passions? You are plunged into the midst of a new world—it can't help but be strange to you at first, and you must feel a trifle forlorn and miserable—at least I should think so——"

Lesley was in a dilemma. Kenyon's words were so true, so apt, that they brought involuntary tears to her eyes. She could get rid of the lump in her throat only by working herself up into a rage : she could dissipate the tears only by making her eyes flash with anger. The melting mood was not to her taste. She chose the more hostile tone.

"Mr. Kenyon, excuse me, but you have no right at all to talk about my being miserable. You may know my father : you do not know me."

"But knowing your father so well——"

"That has nothing to do with it. Am I not a separate human being? What have you to do with me and my feelings? You say that I do not know English ways—is it an English way," cried Lesley, indignantly, "to try to thrust yourself into a girl's confidence, and intrude where you have not been asked to enter? Then English ways are not those that I approve."

Maurice Kenyon felt that his cause was lost. He had gone rather white about the lips as he listened to Lesley's protest. Of course, he had offended her by his abominable want of tact, he told himself—his intrusive proffer of unneeded sympathy and help. But it was not in his nature to acknowledge himself beaten, and to take his leave without a word. His ardor impelled him to speak.

"Miss Brooke, I most sincerely beg your pardon," he said, in tones of deep humility. "I see that I have made

a mistake—but I assure you that it was from the purest motives. I don't"—forgetting his apologetic attitude for a moment—"I *don't* think that you realize what a truly great man your father is—how good, as well as great. I *don't* think you understand him. But I beg your pardon for seeming to think that I could enlighten you. Of course, it must seem like impertinent interference to you. But if you knew"—with a tremor of disappointment in his voice—"what your father has been to me, you would not perhaps be so surprised at my wanting his daughter to sympathize with me in my feelings. I had no idea"—this was intended to be a Parthian shot—"that my admiration would be thought insulting."

He bowed very low, and turned to depart, vowing to himself that nothing would induce him ever to enter that drawing-room again; but Lesley, pale and wide-eyed, called him back.

"Stay, Mr. Kenyon," she said, rising from her seat.

He halted, his hat in one hand, his fingers still on the knob of the door.

"I never meant to say," said Lesley, confronting him, "that I was incapable of sympathy with you in admiration for my father. With my feeling towards him you have nothing to do—that is all. I am not angry because you express your own sentiments, but because——"

She stopped and bit her lip.

"——Because I dared divine what yours might be?" asked Maurice, boldly, and with an accent of reproach. "Is it possible that yours *can* be like mine? and am I to blame for saying so? How can you estimate the worth of his work? You, a girl fresh from school! I know it is very rude to say so, but I cannot help it. If you were more of a woman, Miss Brooke, if you had had a wider experience of life and mankind, you would acknowledge that you could not possibly know very much of what your father had done, and you would be glad of the opportunity of learning!"

This was just the speech calculated to make Lesley furiously angry, and it was with great difficulty that she restrained the words that rose impetuously to her lips. She stood motionless and silent, and Maurice mistook her silence for that of stupid obstinacy, when it was the silence of wounded feeling and passionate resentment. He went

on hotly, for he began to feel himself once more in the right.

"Of course you *may* know all about him : you *may* know as much as I who have lived and worked at his side, so to speak, for the last six years ! You may be familiar with his writings : you may have seen the *Tribune* every week, and you may know that wonderful book of his—'The Unexplored' I mean, not the essays—by heart ; there may be nothing that I can tell you, even about his gallant fight for one of the hospitals last year, or the splendid work he has set going at the Macclesfield Buildings in North London, or the way in which his name is blessed by hundreds—yes hundreds—of men and women and children whom he has helped to lead a better life ! You may know all about these things, and plenty more, but you *can't* know—coming here without having seen him since you were a baby—you *can't* know the beauty of his character, or the depths of his sympathy for the erring, or the tremendous efforts that he has made, and is still making, for the laboring poor. You can't know this, or else I'd tell you, Miss Brooke, what you would be doing ! You would be working heart and soul to lighten his burdens and relieve him of the incessant drudgery that interferes with his higher work, instead of sitting here day after day reading yellow-backed novels in a drawing-room."

And then, in a white heat of indignation, Mr. Maurice Kenyon took his leave. But he did not know the consternation that he had created in Lesley's mind. She was positively frightened by his vehemence. But she had never seen an angry man before—never been spoken to in strong masculine tones of reprobation and disgust, such as it seemed to her that Maurice Kenyon had used. And for what ? She did not know. She was not aware that she had behaved in an unfilial manner to her father. She did not realize that her cold demeanor, her puzzled and bewildered looks, had told Mr. Kenyon far more than she would have cared to confess about the state of her feelings. For the rest, Ethel's words and Maurice's vivid imagination were to blame. And, angry as Lesley was, she felt with a thrill of dismay that Mr. Kenyon's discourteous words were perfectly true. She did not appreciate her father ; she did not know anything about him. All that she had hitherto surmised was bad. And here came a



young man, apparently sane, certainly handsome and clever, although disagreeable—to tell her that Caspar Brooke was a hero, a man among ten thousand, an intellectual giant, an uncrowned king. It was too ridiculous ; and Lesley laughed aloud—although as she laughed she found that her eyes were wet with tears.

## CHAPTER XII.

## "THE UNEXPLORED."

LESLEY retained for some time a feeling of distinct anger against Maurice Kenyon, even while she came to acknowledge the truth of divers of his words. But their truth, she told herself indignantly, was no justification of his brutality. He was horribly rude and meddlesome and intrusive. What business was it of his whether she gave her father or not the meed of praise that he deserved? Why should she be lectured for it by a stranger? Maurice Kenyon's conduct—Maurice Kenyon himself—was intolerable, and she should hate him all the days of her life.

And in good sooth, Maurice's behavior is somewhat hard to excuse. He certainly had no business at all to attack Lesley on the subject of her feelings about her father, and his mode of attack was almost ludicrously wanting in judgment and discrimination. But that which tact and judgment might perhaps have failed to effect, Maurice's sledge-hammer blows brought home to Lesley's understanding. He was to blame, but he did some good, nevertheless. When the first shock was over, Lesley began to reflect that her own world had been a narrow one, and that possibly there were others equally good. And this was a great step to a girl who had been educated in a French convent school.

Part of Lesley's inheritance from her father, and a part of which she was quite unconscious, was a singularly fair mind. She could judge and balance and discriminate with an impartiality which was far beyond the power of the ordinary woman. Being young her impartiality was now and then disturbed by little gusts of passion and prejudice; but the faculty was there to be strengthened by every opportunity of exercising it. This faculty had been stirred within her when Lady Alice first told her of her father's existence; but she had tried to stifle it as an accursed thing. She held it wicked to be anything but a partizan.

And now it had revived within her, and was urging her to form no rash conclusions, to be careful in her thoughts about her new acquaintances, to weigh her opinions before expressing them. And all this in spite of a native fire and vivacity of temperament which might have led her into difficulties but for the counterbalancing power of judgment which she had inherited from the father whom she had been taught to despise.

So although she raged with all her young heart and strength against Mr. Kenyon's construction of her feelings and motives, she had the good sense to ask herself whether there had not been some truth in what he said. After all, what did she know of this strange father of hers, whose every action she judged so harshly? She had heard her mother's story, which certainly placed him in a very unamiable light. But many years had gone by since Lady Alice left her husband, and a man's character might be modified in a dozen years or so. Lesley was willing to go so far. He might even be repentant for the past. Then Sister Rose's words came back to her. She, Lesley, might become the instrument of reconciliation between two who had been long divided!

The color flashed into her face and slowly faded away. What chance had she of gaining her father's ear? True, she could descant by the hour together, if she had the opportunity, on Lady Alice's sweetness and goodness; but when could she get the opportunity of speaking about them to him? He looked on her with an eye of mistrust, almost of contempt. She had been brought up in a school of thought which he despised. How far away from her now, by the by, seemed the old life with which she had been familiar for so many years! the life of simple duties, of easy routine, of praise and tenderness and placid contentment. She was out in the world now, as other girls were who had once shared with her the convent life near Paris. Where were they now—Aglæ and Marthe and Lucile and Anastasie? Did they all find life in the world as difficult as Lesley found it?

No, there was little chance, she decided, of acting as a mediatrix between her parents. Her father would not listen to any word she might say. And she was quite sure that she could never speak of his private affairs to him. They had been divided so many years; they were strangers now, not father and daughter, as they ought to be.

Curious to relate, a feeling of resentment against the decree that had so long severed her from him rose up in Lesley's heart. It was not exactly a feeling of resentment against her mother. Rather it was a protest against fate—the fate that had made that father a sealed book to her, although known and read of all the world beside. If there *were* admirable things in his nature, why had she been kept in ignorance of them?—why told the one ugly fact of his life which seemed to throw all the rest into shadow? It was not fair, Lesley very characteristically remarked to herself: it certainly was not fair.

If he was so distinguished a man in literature as Maurice Kenyon represented him to be, why had she never been allowed to read his books? She wanted, for the first time, to read something that he had written. She supposed she might; for there was no one now to choose her books for her. Only a day or two before she had dutifully asked her Aunt Sophia if she might read a book that Ethel had lent her (it was the yellow-backed novel, the sight of which had made Maurice so angry), and she had said, with her horrid little laugh—oh, how Lesley hated Aunt Sophy's laugh!—

“Good heavens, child, read what you like! You're old enough!”

And Lesley had felt crushed, but resolved to avail herself of the permission. But where should she find her father's works? She would cut out her tongue before she asked Aunt Sophy for them, or her father, or the Kenyons, or Mrs. Romaine.

She set to work to search the library shelves, and was soon rewarded by the discovery of a set of *Tribunes*, a weekly paper in which she knew that her father wrote. She turned over the leaves, with a dazed feeling of bewilderment. None of the articles were signed. And she had no clue to those that were written by her father or anybody else.

She returned the volumes to their places with a heavy sigh, and continued to look through the shelves—especially through the rows of ponderous quartos and octavos, where she thought that her father's works would probably be found. Simple Lesley! It was quite a shock to her when at last—after she had relinquished her search in heartsick disappointment—she suddenly came across a little paper volume bearing this legend:—

"The Unexplored. By Caspar Brooke. Price One Shilling. Tenth Edition."

She took the book in her hand and gazed at it curiously. This was the "wonderful book" of which Maurice Kenyon had spoken. This little shilling pamphlet—really it was little more than a pamphlet! It seemed an extraordinary thing to her that her father should write *shilling books*. "A shilling shocker" was a name that Lesley happened to know, and a thing that she heartily despised. Her taste had been formed on the best models, and Lady Alice had encouraged her in a critical disparagement of cheap literature. Still—if Caspar Brooke had written it, and Maurice Kenyon had recommended it, Lesley felt, with flushing cheek and suspicious eyes, that it was a thing which she ought to read.

Holding it gingerly, as if it were a dangerous combustible which might explode at any moment, she hurried away with it to her own room, turned the key in the lock, and sat down to read.

At the risk of fatiguing my readers, I must say a word or two about Caspar Brooke's romance "The Unexplored." It had obtained a wonderful popularity in all English-speaking countries, and was well known in every quarter of the globe. Even Lady Alice must have seen it advertised and reviewed and quoted a hundred times. Possibly she had refused to read it, or closed her eyes to its merits. Possibly what a man wrote seemed to her of little importance compared to that which a man showed himself in his daily life. At any rate, she had never mentioned the book to her daughter Lesley. She certainly moved in a circle which was slightly deaf to the echoes of literary fame.

"The Unexplored" was one of those powerful romances of an ideal society with which recent days have made us all familiar. But Caspar's book was the forerunner of the shoal which the last ten years have cast upon our shores. He was one of the first to follow in the steps of Sir Thomas More and Sir Philip Sidney, and picture life as it should be rather than as it is. His hero, an Englishman of our own time, puzzled and distressed at the social misery and discord surrounding him, leaves England and joins an exploring expedition. In the unexplored recesses of the new world he comes across a colony founded in ancient days by a people who have preserved an idyllic purity of

heart and manners, together with a fuller artistic life and truer civilization than our own. To these people he brings his stories of London as it is to-day, and fills their gentle hearts with amazement and dismay. A slender thread of love-making gives the book its romantic charm. He gains the affections of the king's daughter, a beautiful maiden, who has been attracted to him from the very first ; and with her he hopes to realize all that has been unknown to him of noble life in his own country. But the book does not end with its hero and heroine lapped in slothful content. For the heart of the maiden burns with sorrow for the toiling poor of the great European cities of which he has told her : to her this region has also the charm of "The Unexplored," and the book ends with a hint that she and her husband are about to wend their way, with a new gospel in their hand, to the very city of which he had shaken the dust from his shoes in disgust before he found an unexplored Arcadia.

There was not much novelty in the plot—the charm of the book lay in the way the story was told, in the beauty of the language ; and also—last but not least—the burning earnestness of the author's tone as he contrasted the hopeless, heartless misery of the poor in our great cities with the ideal life of man. His pictures of London life, drawn from the street, the hospital, the workhouse, were touched in with merciless fidelity : his satire on the modern benevolence and modern civilization which allows such evils to flourish side by side with lecture-rooms, churches, intellectual culture, and refined luxury was keen and scathing. It was a book which had startled people, but had also brought many new truths to their minds. And although no one could be more startled, yet no one could be more avid for the truth than the author's own daughter, of whom he had never thought in the very least when he wrote the book.

Lesley rose from her perusal of it with burning cheeks and humid eyes. She herself, without knowing it, was in much the same position as the heroine of her father's book. Like the girl Ione, in "The Unexplored," she had lived in a charmed seclusion, far from the roar of modern civilization, far from the great cities which are the abomination of desolation in our time. Knowledge had come to her filtered through the minds of those who closed their eyes

to evil and their ears to tales of sin. She did not know how the poor lived : she had only the vaguest and haziest possible notions concerning misery and want and disease. She was not only pure and innocent, but she was ignorant. She had scarcely ever seen a newspaper. She had read very few novels. She had lived almost all her life with women, and she had imbibed the notion that her marriage was a matter which her mother would arrange without particularly consulting her (Lesley's) inclinations.

To a girl brought up in this way there was much to shock and repel in Caspar Brooke's romance. More than once, indeed, she put it down indignantly : more than once she cried out, in the silence of her room, " Oh, but it can't be true ! " Nevertheless, she knew in her heart of hearts that the strong and burning words which she was reading could not have been written were they not sincerely felt. And as for facts, she could easily put them to the test. She could ask other people to tell her whether they were true. Were there really so many criminals in London ; so many people " without visible means of subsistence ? " so many children going out in a morning to their Board Schools without breakfast ? But surely something ought to be done ! How could people sit down and allow these things to be ? How could her father himself, who wrote about such things, live in comfort, even (compared with the wretchedly poor) in modest luxury, without lifting a finger to help them ?

But there Lesley caught herself up. What had Mr. Kenyon said ? Had he not spoken of the things that Caspar Brooke had done ? For almost the first time Lesley began to wonder what made her father so busy. She had never heard a word concerning the pursuits that Mr. Kenyon had mentioned as so engrossing. " The splendid work at Macclesfield Buildings : " what was that ? The people whom he had helped : what people ? Whom could she ask ? Not her father himself—that was out of the question. He never spoke to her except on trivial subjects. She remembered with a sudden and painful flash of insight, that conversations between him and his sister were sometimes broken off when she came into the room, or carried on in half-phrases and under-tones. Of course she *had* heard of Macclesfield Buildings ; and of a club and an institute and a hospital, and what not ; but the words

had gone over her head, being destitute of meaning and of interest for her. She had been blind and deaf, it seemed to her now, ever since she came into the house ; but Maurice Kenyon and her father's book had opened her eyes to the reality of things.

Later on in the day her maid came to help her to dress for dinner. Lesley looked at her with new interest. For was she not one of the great, poor, struggling mass of human beings whom her father called "the People?" Not the happy peasant-class, as depicted in sentimental story-books : whether that existed or not, Lesley was not learned enough to say : it certainly did not exist in London. She looked at the woman who waited on her with keenly observant eyes. Her name was Mary Kingston, and Lesley knew that she was not one of the prosperous, self-satisfied, over-dressed type, so common amongst ladies' maids ; for she had been "out of a situation" for some time, and had fallen into dire straits of poverty. It would not have been like Miss Brooke to hire a common-place, conventional ladies' maid ; she really preferred a servant "with a history." Lesley remembered that she had heard of Mary Kingston's past difficulties without noting them.

"Kingston," she said, gently, "do you know much about the poor?"

Kingston started and colored. She was a woman of more than thirty years of age—pale, thin, flat-chested, not very tall ; she had fairly good features and dark, expressive eyes ; but she was not attractive-looking. Her lips were too pale and her dark eyes too sunken for beauty. There was a gentleness in her manner, however, a patience in her low voice, which Lesley had always liked. It reminded her, in some undefined way, of her old friend, Sister Rose.

"I've lived among the poor all my life, ma'am," Kingston said.

"Do they suffer very much?" Lesley asked.

Kingston looked slightly puzzled. "Suffer, ma'am?"

"Yes—from hunger and cold, I mean : I have been reading about poor people in this book—and——"

Kingston cast a rapid glance at the volume. Her face kindled at once.

"Oh," she said, "I've read that book, ma'am, and what a beautiful book it is !"



"Do you know it?" Lesley asked, amazed. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, "And you know it was written by my father?"

Who would have thought that she could say the last two words with such an accent of tender pride?

"No, ma'am, I did not know. Is it really *this* Mr. Brooke? The name, you see, is not so uncommon as some, and I did not think——"

"I know, I know," said Lesley, hurriedly. "But just tell me this—is it true? Do the poor people suffer as much in England as he says they do?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, I'm afraid so, at least. I've seen a good deal of suffering in my day."

Lesley was quiet for a little while, and the woman brushed out her shining hair. "Tell me," she said, "what is the worst suffering of all—will you? I mean, a suffering caused by being poor—nothing to do with your own life, of course. Is it the being hungry, or cold—or what?"

Kingston considered for a moment. "I think," she said at last, "it isn't the being cold or hungry yourself that matters so much as seeing those that belong to you cold and hungry. That's the worst. If you have children, it does go to your heart to hear them ask you for something to eat, and you have nothing to give them."

"Yes," said Lesley, softly, "I should think that is the worst."

"But I don't know," said Kingston, in a perfectly unmoved and stolid tone, "whether it's worse than having no candles."

Lesley looked up in astonishment.

"It's when any one's ill that you feel that," the woman went on, in the same level tones. "In winter it's dark, maybe, at four o'clock, and not light again till nearly nine in the morning. It doesn't matter so much if you can go out. But if you have to sit by some one who's ill, and you can't see their faces, and if they leave off moaning you think they're dead—and perhaps when the early morning light comes it's only a dead face you have to look upon, and you never saw them draw their last breath—why, then, you feel mad-like to think of the candles that are wasted in big houses and of the bread that's thrown away."

Lesley listened, appalled. A homely detail of this kind impressed her more than any appeal to her higher imagin-

ation. The woes of the poor had suddenly become real.

"I hope you never had to go through all that, Kingston," she said, very gently.

"Yes, ma'am, twice," said Kingston. "Once with my mother, and once with my little boy. They were both dead in the morning, but I didn't see 'em die."

"But where was your husband? Was he dead?" said Lesley, quickly.

"Oh, no, ma'am. But he was amusing himself. He was a gentleman, you see—more shame to me, perhaps you'll say. I couldn't expect him to think of things like candles."

"Oh!—And is he—is he dead?"

"No ma'am, he isn't dead," said Kingston. And from the shortness of her tone and the steadiness with which she averted her face Lesley came to the conclusion that she did not want to be questioned any more.

Lesley went down to dinner feeling that she had made some new and extraordinary discoveries. She noticed that her father and her aunt made several allusions which would have seemed mysterious and repellant to her the day before, but which now possessed an almost tragic interest. When before had she heard her aunt speak casually of a Mothers' Meeting and a Lending Library? These were common-place matters to the ordinary English girl; but to Lesley they possessed the elements of a romance. For was it not by means of hackneyed, common-place machinery of this kind that cultured men and women put themselves into relation with the great, suffering, coarse, uncultured, human-hearted poor?

## CHAPTER XIII.

## LESLEY SEEKS ADVICE.

ADDED to Lesley's new views of life, there was also a new feeling for her father. In the first rush of enthusiastic admiration for his book, she forgot all that she had heard against him, and believed—for the moment—that he was all Maurice Kenyon represented him to be. But naturally this state of mind could not last. The long years of her mother's influence told against any claim to love or respect on the father's part. Lesley remembered how bitterly Lady Alice spoke of him. She could not think that her mother had been wrong.

It is a terrible position for a son or daughter—to have to judge between father and mother. It is a wrong position, and one in which Lesley felt instinctively that she ought never to have been placed. Of course it was impossible for her to help it. Father and mother had virtually made her their judge. They said to her, "Live for a year with each of us, and choose which you prefer. You cannot have us both." And as the only true and natural position for a child is that in which he or she can have both, Lesley Brooke was in a very trying situation. She had begun life in her father's house as her mother's ardent partisan; and she was her mother's partisan still. Only she was not quite sure whether she was not going to find that she could love her father too. And in that case, Lesley was tremulously certain that Lady Alice would accuse her of unfaithfulness to *her*.

She turned with a sigh from the contemplation of her position to her new views of London and modern life. The poverty and ignorance of which she read had seemed hateful to her. But her impulse—always the impulse of generous souls—was not to shrink away from this newly-discovered misery, but to go down into the midst of it and help to cure the evil.

Still blindly ignorant of what was already done, or doing, she hardly knew in which way to begin a work that was so new to her. Indeed, she hardly estimated its difficulties. All the poor that she had ever seen were the blue-bloused peasants, or brown-faced crones, and quaint little maidens with pigtails, who had visited the convent at Fontainebleau. She was quite sure that English poor people were not like these. Her father knew a great deal about them, but she could not ask him. The very way in which he spoke to her—lightly always, and jestingly—made serious questioning impossible. To whom then should she apply? The answer presented itself almost immediately, and with extraordinary readiness—to Mr. Oliver Trent.

This decision was not so remarkable as it at first may seem. Lesley had run over in her mind a list of the persons whom she could not or would not ask. Her father and Miss Brooke?—impossible. Mrs. Romaine?—certainly not. Ethel?—Lesley did not believe that she knew anything about the poor. Maurice Kenyon?—not for worlds. The neighboring clergy?—Mr. Brooke had said that he did not want “the Blacks” about his house. The other men and women whom Lesley had seen were mere casual acquaintances; not friends of the family, like Oliver Trent.

At least, she *supposed* that Oliver was a friend of the family. He was Mrs. Romaine’s brother; and Mrs. Romaine was a good deal at the house. In her own mind Lesley put him on the same footing as Mr. Kenyon—which estimate would have made Caspar Brooke exceedingly indignant, could he have known it. For though he did not exactly dislike Oliver Trent, he would never have thought of classing him with his friend, Maurice Kenyon.

But Oliver had already called twice on some pretext or other, since Lesley had come home: and on the latter of these occasions he had sat for a full hour with her in the drawing-room, talking chiefly of France and Italy—in low and softly modulated tones. Lesley was losing all her horror of interviews with young men. If the nuns had seen her now they would indeed have thought her lost to all sense of propriety. For one of Miss Brooke’s chief theories was that no self-respecting young woman needs a chaperon. And she had flatly refused to chaperone Lesley except on inevitable or really desirable occasions. “The

girl must learn to go about the world by herself," she had said. "And I will say this for Lesley, she is not naturally timid or helpless—it is only training that makes her so." And under this tuition Lesley soon acquired the self-possession in which she had been somewhat wanting when she came, newly-fledged, from her convent.

So when Oliver called again—it was on a message from his sister, and it had not yet recurred to Lesley to wonder at the readiness shown by English brothers to run on messages to their sisters' friends—he found Lesley alone, as usual, in the drawing-room, and she welcomed him with considerable warmth—a warmth that took him by surprise. "I am so glad to see you, Mr. Trent: I wanted to ask you something," she said, at once.

"Ask me anything—command me in anything," he replied.

He sank into a low chair at her right hand, and looked quite devotionally into her face. Lesley felt a trifle disturbed. She could not forget that Oliver was Ethel's lover, and she did not think that he ought to look at her so *eagerly*—she did not know what else to call it. It was a look that made her uncomfortable. Nobody had ever looked at her in that way before. They did not look like that in the convent.

"It is nothing very particular," she said, shrinking back a little. "Only I have nobody to ask."

"I know—I understand," said Oliver, in his softest tones. Somehow his sympathy did not offend her, as Mr. Kenyon's had done.

"It is very stupid of me," Lesley went on, trying to smile, "not to ask my father or Aunt Sophy; but I am afraid they would only laugh at me."

"I shall not laugh at you," said Oliver, marvelling inwardly.

"Won't you? You are sure? It is only a little, stupid, ordinary question. Do you know anything about Macclesfield Buildings?"

Oliver drew himself up in his chair. Was *that* the question? He did not believe it. But he answered her unsmilingly.

"Yes, Miss Brooke. They are the blocks of workmen's dwellings where your father has founded a Club.

"Has he?" said Lesley, her eyes dilating. "That is—very good of him, isn't it?"

"Oh, I suppose so," Oliver answered, with a little laugh. "Of course—but I must not insinuate worldly motives into his daughter's ears!"

"Oh, please, go on: I want to hear!"

"It is nothing wrong. Only if a man wants to stand well with the working-people—if he wants votes, for instance—it isn't at all a bad move to begin with a Working-Men's Club."

"Votes, Mr. Trent? What for?"

"School Board, or County Council, or Parliament," said Oliver, coolly. "Or even Board of Guardians. I don't know what your father's ambitions are, exactly. But popularity is always a good thing."

Lesley pondered a little, the color rising in her cheeks. "Then," she said, "you think my father does good things from—from what people call 'interested motives?'"

"Good heavens, no, Miss Brooke, I never said anything of the kind," declared Oliver, somewhat alarmed by her straightforwardness. "I was only thinking of the general actions of man, not of your father in particular."

Lesley nodded. "I don't quite understand," she said. "But that doesn't matter for the present. I have another question to ask you, Mr. Trent. Do you know anything about the poor?"

"I'm very poor myself," said Oliver, laughing. "Horribly poor. 'Pon my word, I don't know any one poorer."

"Oh, you are laughing at me now," said Lesley, almost petulantly. "And you said that you would not laugh."

She leaned back in her chair, with heightened color and brightening eyes: her breath came a little more quickly than usual, as if her pulses were quickened. There is nothing so catching as emotion. Oliver's sluggish pulses began to stir at the sight of her. That soft and tender face seemed more beautiful to him than the sparkle and vivacity of Ethel Kenyon's. If it had not been for Ethel's twenty thousand pounds, he did not know but what he would have preferred Lesley. Rosy had said that Lesley would suit him best.

"I am not laughing; I swear I am not," he said earnestly. "I know what you mean—you are thinking of the London poor. Your tender heart has been stirred by the sight of them in the streets—they are dreadful to look at, are they not? It is like you to feel their woes so acutely."

"I want to know," said Lesley, rather plaintively, "whether I cannot do anything for them?"

"You—do anything—for the poor?" repeated Oliver. Then he scanned her narrowly—scanned her shining hair, delicate features, Paris-made gown, and dainty shoe—and laughed a little. "You can let them look at you—that ought to be enough," he said.

Lesley frowned. "Nonsense, Mr. Trent. What does my father do for his Club?"

"Smokes with the men, sometimes, I believe. You couldn't do that, you know——"

"Although——" and then Lesley stopped short and laughed.

"Although Aunt Sophy does. It's no secret, my dear Miss Brooke. Half the women in London smoke now-a-days, I believe. Even my sister indulges now and then

Lesley gave her head a little toss. "What else does father do?" she asked.

"Sings to them. Sunday afternoon, that is, you know. The wives are allowed to come to the Club-room then, and he has a sort of little concert for them—good music, sacred music, even, I believe. He gets professionals to come now and then; they will do anything to oblige your father, you know—and when they don't come, he sings himself. He really has a very good bass voice."

"Ladies don't sing, I suppose," said Lesley, after a little pause.

"Oh, yes, they do. He nearly always has a lady to sing. Why don't you go down on a Sunday afternoon? The club is open to friends of the founder, if not of the members, on Sunday afternoons. Don't Mr. Brooke and Miss Brooke always go?"

"I suppose they do—I never asked where they went," said Lesley, with burning cheeks. She remembered that they always did disappear on Sunday afternoons. No, she had not asked; she had not hitherto felt any curiosity as to their doings; and they had not asked her to accompany them. She began to resent their lack of readiness to invite her to the club.

"You might go down on Sunday afternoon," said Oliver, lazily. "I'm going: they have asked me to sing. Though you mayn't know it, Miss Brooke, I have a very decent tenor voice. Ethel is going with me. Won't you come?"

"I don't know," said Lesley, nervously. She bethought herself that she could not easily propose to accompany her father, and that Ethel and Oliver Trent would not want her. She would be one too many in either party. She could not go.

But Oliver read the reason of her scruples. "If you will allow me," he said, "I will ask my sister to come too. Then we shall be a compact little party of four, and we can start off without telling Mr. Brooke anything about it."

Lesley hesitated a little, but finally consented. She had a great desire to see what was going on in Macclesfield Buildings. But Oliver, it may be feared, believed in his heart that she went because he was going. And he resolved to bestow his society on her rather than on Ethel and Mrs. Romaine on Sunday. It was decidedly more amusing to look on that still sweet face to animation than to engage in a war of wit with Ethel.

Lesley thought of Oliver very little. Once or twice he had startled her by an assumption of intimacy, a softening of his voice, and a look of tenderness in his eyes, which made her shrink into herself with an instinctive emotion of dislike. But she had then proceeded to scold herself for foolish shyness and prudery—the prudery of a French-school girl, who was not accustomed to the ways of men. She had begun to feel herself very ignorant of the world since she came to her father's house. It would never do to offend one of her father's friends by seeming afraid of him. So she tried to smile and looked pleased when Oliver drew near, and she was all the more gracious to him because she had already quarrelled with Maurice Kenyon, who was even more her father's friend than Oliver himself. But what could she do? Mr. Kenyon had insulted her—the hot blood rose to her cheeks as she thought of some of the things that he had said. Insulted her by assuming that she could not appreciate her father because she was too careless, too frivolous, too foolish to do so. That she was ignorant, Lesley was ready to acknowledge; but not that she was incapable of learning.

Oliver had no difficulty in persuading his sister to make one of the party on Sunday afternoon. Indeed, Mrs. Romaine made the expedition easier by inviting Lesley to lunch with her beforehand.



"I asked Maurice and Ethel Kenyon, too," she said to Lesley, "but they would not come. Mr. Kenyon had his patients to attend to; and Ethel would not leave him to lunch alone."

Lesley did not answer, but privately reflected that if the Kenyons had accepted the invitation she would have lunched at home.

She went to church by herself on Sunday morning, for Mr. Brooke was not up, and Doctor Sophy frequented some assembly of eclectic souls, of which Lesley had never heard before. So she went demurely to that ugliest of all Protestant temples, St. Pancras' Church, and was not very much surprised when she perceived that Oliver Trent was in the seat behind her, and that he sat so that he could see her face.

"I did not know that you went to St. Pancras'," she said, innocently, as they stood on the steps together outside when the service was over.

"Nor do I," he answered her. "It is the most hideous church I ever saw. But there was an attraction this morning."

Lesley looked as if she did not understand. And indeed she did not.

"You are coming to lunch with us, are you not? Will you let me escort you?"

"Thank you, Mr. Trent. But—do you mind?—I shall have to call at my father's house on my way. Just to leave my prayer-book. It will not take me a minute."

Oliver could not object, although he was not altogether pleased. For Mr. Brooke's house was immediately opposite the Kenyons', and Miss Ethel was as likely as not to be sitting at the drawing-room window. Her sharp eyes would espy him from afar, and she might ask Lesley if he had been to church with her. Not a very great difficulty, but Oliver had a far-seeing mind, and one question might lead to others of a more serious kind.

However, there was no help for it. He paused on the steps of number fifty, while Lesley rang the bell. She had been formally presented with a latch-key, but the use of it was so new to her, and the fear of losing it so great, that she usually left it on her dressing-table.

A maid opened the door and said something to Lesley in an under tone. Oliver was looking across the street

and neither heard the words nor saw the woman's face. But Lesley turned to him hastily.

"Oh, Mr. Trent, I am so sorry to keep you waiting, but I must run up to my aunt for a moment."

She disappeared into the house, and then Oliver turned and met the eyes of Lesley's waiting-maid. And at the same moment he was aware—as one is sometimes aware of what goes on behind one's back—that Ethel, in her pretty autumn dress of fawn-color and deep brown, had come out upon the balcony of her house and was observing him.

"*You, Mary?*" said Oliver, in a stifled whisper.

The woman looked at him with hard, defiant eyes. "Yes, me," she said. "You ought to know that I couldn't do anything else."

He stood looking at her with a frown.

"This is the last place where you ought to have come," he said.

"Because they are friends of yours?" she asked. "I can't help that. I didn't know it when I came, but I know it now."

"Then leave," said Oliver, still in the lowest possible tone, but also with all possible intensity. "Leave as soon as you can. I'll find you another place. It is the worst thing you can do for your own interest to remain here, where you may be recognized."

"I can take care of that," said Mary Kingston, icily. "I'll think over it."

Oliver put his hand into his pocket as if in search of a coin. But Kingston suddenly shook her head. "No," she said, quickly, "I don't want it. Not from you."

And then Lesley's foot was heard upon the stairs.

Oliver looked up to Ethel's balcony. Yes, she was there, her hand upon the railing, her eyes fixed on him with what was evidently a puzzled stare. Oliver smiled and raised his hat. Ethel nodded and smiled in return. But he fancied—though, of course, at that distance he could not be sure—that she still looked puzzled as she returned his bow and smile.

He walked on with Lesley. But his good-humor was gone: the usual suavity of his manner was a little ruffled. His recognition of Mary Kingston had evidently been displeasing as well as embarrassing to him.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"HOME, SWEET HOME."

MRS. ROMAINÉ and Oliver Trent attributed Lesley's desire to see Macclesfield Buildings to a young girl's curiosity, and, perhaps, to a desire for Oliver's company. They had no conception of the new fancies and feelings, aims and interests, which were developing in her soul. Only so much of these were visible as to lead Oliver to say to his sister before they sallied forth that afternoon—

"I fancy she is getting up an enthusiasm for her father. Won't that be awkward for you?"

Mrs. Romainé was silent for a moment. Then she answered, with perfect quietness—

"I think it will be more awkward for Lady Alice. It may be rather convenient for us."

And Oliver noticed that for the rest of the afternoon she took every opportunity of indirectly and directly praising Mr. Brooke, his works and ways. But he could not see that Lesley looked pleased—perhaps Mrs. Romainé's words had rather an artificial ring.

Somehow, it seemed to Lesley as if she hated the expedition on which she came. Was it not a little too like spying upon her father's work? He had never invited her to Macclesfield Buildings. And he would never know the spirit in which she came: it would seem to him as though she had been brought in Mrs. Romainé's train, perhaps against her will, to laugh, to stare, to criticize. She would rather have crept in humbly, and tried to understand, by herself, what he was trying to do. What would he think of her when he saw her there that afternoon?

She was morbidly afraid of him and of his opinion. Caspar Brooke would have been as much hurt as astonished if he knew in what ogre-like light she regarded him.

Ethel joined them before they started for Macclesfield Buildings, and as rain was beginning to fall, Oliver insisted

that they should take a cab. It was for his own sake, as Rosalind reminded him, rather than for theirs. He had a profound dislike of dirty streets, dirty people, unpleasant sights and sounds. And there were plenty of these to be encountered in the North London district to which they were bound that afternoon.

The three Londoners—for such they virtually were—could hardly refrain from laughing when they saw Lesley's horrified face as the cab drove up to the block of buildings in which the club was situated. "But this is a prison—a workhouse—a lunatic asylum!" she exclaimed. "People do not live here—do they—in this dreary place?"

Ah, me, and a dreary place it was! Three lofty blocks of building, all of the same drab hue, with iron-railed balconies outside the narrow windows, and a great court-yard in which a number of children romped and howled and shrieked in play: it was perhaps the most depressingly ugly bit of architecture that Lesley had ever seen. In vain her friends told her of the superior sanitary arrangements, the ventilation, the drainage, the pure water "laid on;" all she could do was to clasp her hand, and say, with positive tears in her bright eyes, "But *why* could it not all have been made more beautiful?" And indeed it is hard to say why not.

"Now we are going down into a coal hole," said Oliver, as he helped the ladies to alight. "At least it was once a coal-hole. Yes, it was. These four rooms were used as storehouses for coals and vegetables until your father rented them: you will see what they look like now."

"Lesley is horrified," said Ethel, with a little laugh.

"Not at the coal-hole," Lesley answered, trying also to be merry, "but at the ugliness of it all. Don't you think this kind of ugliness almost wicked?"

"Oliver thinks all ugliness wicked," said Mrs. Romaine, maliciously.

"Then *we* ought to be very good," said Ethel. But Oliver did not answer: he was looking at Lesley, whose face had grown pale.

"Are you tired?—are you ill?" he asked her, in the gentlest undertones. They were still picking their way over the muddy stones of the court-yards, and rough children ran up to them now and then, and clamored for a penny. "Is the sight of this place too much for you?"

"Oh, no," said Lesley, with a sudden, inexplicable flush of color. "It is not that—it is ugly, of course ; but I do not mind it at all."

Oliver glanced round suspiciously, as if to discover why she had blushed. All that he could see was the tall figure of Maurice Kenyon, who was standing in a doorway talking to somebody on the stairs. Even if Lesley had seen him, she surely would not blush for that ! What chance had Kenyon had of becoming acquainted with her ? Oliver forgot that other sisters besides his own might send their brothers on messages.

Down a flight of stone steps, through a low doorway, and into a dark little corridor, was Lesley conducted. She noticed that Mrs. Romaine and Ethel were quite accustomed to the place. "We have often been before, you know," Ethel explained. "It's your father's hobby, you know ; his doll's house, or Noah's Ark, or whatever you like to call it—his pet toy. I always call it his Noah's Ark myself. The animals walk in two by two. The men may bring their wives on Sundays. Oh, by the bye, Lesley, I hope you don't mind smoke. The men have their pipes, you know."

And then Lesley, dazzled and confounded by her surroundings, found herself in a brilliantly lighted room of considerable size—really two ordinary rooms thrown into one. Immediately the squalor and ugliness of the outer world were thrown into the background. The walls of the room were distempered—Indian red below, warm grey above ; and on the grey walls were hung fine photographs of well-known foreign buildings or of celebrated paintings. In one part of the room stood a magnificent billiard-table, now neatly covered with a cloth. A neat little piano was placed at the other end of the room, near a large table covered with a scarlet cloth, strewn with magazines, papers, and books, and decorated with flowers. The chairs were of solid make, seated with red leather ornamented with brass nails. In fact, the whole place was not only comfortable, but cheery and pleasant to the eye. Lesley was told that there was also a library, beside a kitchen and pantry, whence visitors could get tea or coffee, "temperance drinks," and rolls or cakes.

A few women in their "Sunday best" were looking at the books and periodicals, or gossiping together, but they

were not so numerous as the men—respectable working-men for the most part ; some of them smoking, some reading or talking, without their pipes. In one little group Lesley recognized, with a start, that her father was the centre of attraction. He was sitting, as the other men were, and he was talking: the musical notes of his cultivated voice rose clearly above the hum of rougher and huskier voices. Lesley gathered that some proposition had been made which he was combating.

"No," he said, "I won't have it. Look here—did you open this club, or did I?"

"You did, guv'nor," said one of the men.

"Then I'll have my say in the management. Some of you want the women turned out, do you? It's the curse of modern life, the curse of English and all other society, that you do want the women turned out, you men, wherever you go. And the reason is that women are better than you are. They are purer, nobler, more conscientious than you, and therefore you don't want them with you when you take your pleasures. Eh?"

There was a melodious geniality about the last monosyllable which made the men smile in spite of themselves.

"'Taint that," said one of them, awkwardly. "It's because they're apt to neglect their 'omes if they come out of an afternoon or an evening like we do."

"Not they!" said Mr. Brooke. "To come out now and then is to make them love their homes, man. They'll put more heart into their work, if they have a little rest and enjoyment now and then, as you do. Besides—you've got hold of a wrong principle. The women are not your slaves and servants ; they ought not to be. They are your companions, your helpers. The more they are in sympathy with you, the better they will help you. Don't keep your wives out of the brighter moments of your lives, else they will forget how to feel with you, and help you when darker moments come!"

There was a pause ; and then a man, with rather a sullen face—evidently one of the malcontents—said, with a growl,

"Fine talk, gov'nor. It'll end in our wives leaving us, like they say yours done."

There was an instant hiss and groan of disapproval. So marked, indeed, that the man rose to shoulder his way to the door. Evidently he was not a popular character.

"We'll pay him out, if you like, sir," said a youth ; and some of the older men half rose as if to execute the threat.

"Sit down : let him alone," said Mr. Brooke, sharply. "He's a poor fool, and he knows it. Every man's a fool that does not reverence women. And if women would try to be worthy of that reverence, the world would be better than it is."

He rose as he spoke, with apparent carelessness, but those who knew him best saw that the taunt had stung him. And as he moved, he caught Lesley's eye. He had not known that she was to be there ; and by something in her expression—by her heightened color, perhaps, or her startled eye—he saw at once that she had heard the man's rude speech and his reply.

He stopped short, grasped at his beard as his manner was, especially when he was perplexed or embarrassed ; then crossed over towards her, laid his hand on her arm, and spoke in a tone of unusual tenderness.

"*You* here, my child ?"

Lesley thrilled all over with the novel pleasure of what seemed to her like commendation. But she could not answer suitably.

"Mrs. Romaine brought me," she said.

"Ah ! Mrs. Romaine ?"—in quite a different tone. "Very kind of Mrs. Romaine, By the bye, Maurice"—to Mr. Kenyon, who had just appeared upon the scene, and was looking with curiously anxious eyes at Lesley—"the music ought to begin now. Is Trent ready ? And will Ethel recite something ? That's all right—I suppose Miss Bellot will be here presently.

And leaving Lesley without another glance, he went to the piano and opened it. The audience settled itself in its place, and gave a little sigh of expectation. Mr. Brooke's Sunday afternoon "recitals," from four to five, always gave great satisfaction.

Oliver sang first, then Ethel recited something ; then Mr. Brooke sang, and then Oliver played—he was a very useful young man in his way—and then there came a little pause.

"A certain Miss Bellot promised to come and sing, but she has not appeared," Ethel explained to her friend. "Lesley, you can sing : I know you can, for I saw a lot of songs in your portfolio the other day. Won't you give them something ?"

"Oh, no, I couldn't!"

"It's not a critical audience," said Oliver, on her other side. "You might try. The people are growing impatient, and your father will be disappointed if things do not go well——"

Lesley flushed deeply. A week ago she would have thought—What is it to me if my father is disappointed? But she could not think so to-night.

"I have no music here. And I cannot sing properly when I play my own accompaniments."

"Tell me something you know and let me see whether I can play it," said Oliver.

She paused for a moment, then, with a smile in her eyes, she mentioned a name which made him laugh and elevate his eyebrows. "Do you know *that*?" she said.

"Rather! Is it not a trifle hackneyed? Ah, well, not for this audience, perhaps. Yes, I will play." And then, just as Caspar Brooke, with a slight gesture of annoyance, turned to explain to the people that a singer whom he expected had not come, Oliver touched him on the arm.

"Miss Brooke is going to sing, please," he said. "Will you announce her?"

Mr. Brooke stared hard for a moment, then bowed his head.

"My daughter will now sing to you," he said, curtly, and sat down again, grasping his brown beard with one hand.

"*Can* she sing?" Mrs. Romaine said in his ear, with an accent of veiled surprise.

"I do not know in the least. I hope it will be English, at any rate. These good people don't care for French and Italian things."

Mrs. Romaine saw that he looked undoubtedly nervous, and just then Oliver began the prelude to Lesley's song. It was certainly English enough. It was "Home, Sweet Home."

Every one looked up at the sound of the familiar air. "Hackneyed" as Oliver had declared it to be, it is a song which every audience loves to hear. And Lesley made a pretty picture for the eyes to rest upon while she sang. She was dressed from top to toe in a delicate shade of grey, which suited her fair skin admirably: the grey was relieved by some broad white ribbons and a vest of soft



white silk folds, according to the prevailing fashion. A wide-brimmed grey hat, trimmed with drooping grey ostrich feathers, also became her extremely well. Mrs. Romaine noticed that Caspar Brooke looked at her hard for a minute or two, and then sat with his eyes fixed on the ground, his right hand forming a pillow for his left elbow, and his left hand engaged in stroking his big brown beard. What she did not notice was, that Maurice Kenyon had withdrawn himself to a post behind Mr. Brooke's chair, where he could see and not be seen ; and that his eyes were riveted upon the fair singer with an expression which betokened more perplexity than admiration.

As Lesley's pure, sweet notes floated out upon the air, there was an instant stir of approbation and interest among the listeners. If the girl had been less intent upon her singing, the unmoved and unmoving stare of these men and women might have made her a little nervous. It was their way of showing attention. The men had even put down their pipes. But Lesley did not see them. She had chosen her song at haphazard, as one which these people were likely to understand ; but its painful appropriateness to her own case, perhaps to her mother's case as well, only came home to her as she continued it.

"Mid pleasures and palaces—though I may roam—  
Be it never so humble, there's no place like home.  
A charm from the heart seems to hallow it there,  
Which, seek through the world, is not met with elsewhere."

If Lesley's voice faltered a little while singing words with which she herself felt forced to disagree, and to which her mother had given the lie by running away from the home Caspar Brooke had provided for her, the hesitation and tremulousness were set down by the hearers as a very pretty bit of artistic skill, which they were not at all slow to appreciate. Mrs. Romaine put up her eye-glass and looked narrowly at the girl during the last few notes.

"How well she sings !" she murmured in Mr. Brooke's ear. "Positively, as if she felt it !"

Caspar Brooke gave a little start, left off handling his beard, and sat up shrugging his shoulders. "A good deal of dramatic talent, I fancy," he observed. But he could say no more, for the people were clapping their hands and stamping with their feet, in their eagerness for another

song ; and he was obliged to be silent until the tumult abated.

"You must sing again?" said Oliver.

"Must I? Really? But—shall I sing what English people call a sacred piece? A Sunday piece, you know? 'Angels ever bright and fair'—can you play that?"

Oliver could play that. And Lesley sang it with great applause.

But, being a keenly observant young person, and also in a very sensitive state, she noticed that her father held aloof and did not look quite well pleased. And she, remembering her refusal to take singing lessons, felt, naturally, a little guilty.

She had not time, however, to dwell upon her own feelings. The assembly began to disperse, for Mr. Brooke did not let the hours of his "meeting" encroach on church hours, and it was time to go. But almost every man, and certainly every woman, insisted on shaking hands with Lesley, most of them saying, with a friendly nod, that they hoped she'd come again.

"You're Mr. Brooke's daughter, ain't you, miss?" said a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, with honest eyes and a pleasant smile, which Lesley liked.

"Yes, I am."

"I hope you'll give us a bit of your singing another Sunday. 'Tis a treat to hear you, it is."

"Yes, I shall be glad to come again," said Lesley.

"That's like your father's daughter," said the man, heartily. "Meaning no disrespect to you, miss. But Mr. Brooke's the life and soul of this place: he's splendid—just splendid; and we can't think too high of him. So it's right and fitting that his daughter should take after him."

Lesley stood confused, but pleased. And then the man lowered his voice and spoke confidentially.

"There was a bit of a breeze this afternoon, just after you came in, I think; but you mustn't suppose that we have trouble o' that sort every Sunday, or week-day either. It was just one low, blackguardly fellow that got in and wanted to make a disturbance. But he won't do it again, for we'll have a meeting, and turn him out to-morrow. I would just like you to understand, miss, that a good few of us in this here club would pretty nigh lay down our lives for Mr. Brooke if he wanted them—for myself I

wouldn't even say 'pretty nigh,' for I'd do it in a jiffy. He's helped to save some of us from worse than death, miss, and that's why."

"Come, Jim Gregson," said a cheery voice behind him, "you get along home to your tea. Time for shutting up just now. Good-bye."

And Caspar Brooke held out his hand for the workman to shake. He had only just come up, and could not therefore have heard what Gregson was saying; but Lesley preferred to turn away without meeting his eye. For in truth her own were full of tears.

She broke away from the little group, and went into the library, as if she wanted to inspect the books. But in reality she wanted a moment's silence and loneliness in which to get rid of the swelling in her throat, the tears in her eyes. These were caused partly by excitement, partly by an expression of feeling brought to her by the earnestness of Gregson's words, partly by penitence. And it was before she had well got rid of them that Maurice Kenyon put his head into the room and found her there.

"We are going now, Miss Brooke," he said. "Will you come? I—I hope I'm not disturbing you—I——"

"I am just coming," said Lesley, dashing the tears from her face. "I am quite ready."

"There is no hurry. You can let them go on first, if you like," said Maurice, partly closing the door. Then, in the short pause that followed, he advanced a little way into the room.

"Miss Brooke," he said, "I hope you will not mind my speaking to you again; but I want to say that I wish—most humbly and with all my heart—to beg your pardon. Will you forgive me?"

## CHAPTER XV.

## MAURICE KENYON'S APOLOGY.

LESLEY stood irresolute. In the other room she heard the sound of voices calling her own name. "We are just going, Lesley," she heard Mrs. Romaine say. She made a hurried step towards the door.

"I can't stop," she said. "They will go without me."

"What if they do?" asked Mr. Kenyon. "I'll see you home."

Lesley looked amazed, as well she might, at this masterful way of settling the question. And while she hesitated Maurice acted, as he usually did.

He strode to the door and spoke to Miss Brooke. "I am just showing your niece some of the books: I'll follow in a minute or two with her if you'll kindly walk on. It won't take me more than a minute."

"Then we may as well wait," said Oliver's voice.

Lesley would have been very angry if she had known what happened then. Mr. Kenyon, by means of energetic pantomime, conveyed to the quick perceptions of Doctor Sophy a knowledge of the fact that Lesley was a little agitated and overcome, and that he was soothing her. And that the departure of the rest of the party would be a blessed relief.

Aunt Sophy was good-natured, and she had complete trust in Maurice Kenyon.

"Don't stay more than a minute or two," she said. "We'll just walk on then—Caspar and I. Mr. Trent is, of course, escorting your sister. Mrs. Romaine will come with us, and you'll follow?"

"I am quite ready," said Lesley.

"All right," answered Maurice, easily, "I must first show you this book." Then he returned to the library, and she heard the sounds of retreating steps and voices as her father and his party left the building.

"You have no book to show me—you had better come at once," Lesley said, severely. But Mr. Kenyon arrested her.

"I assure you I have. Look here: the men clubbed together a little while ago and presented your father's works to the library, all bound, you see, in vellum. I need not mention that *he* had not thought it worth while to give his own books to the club."

He showed her the volumes with pride, as if the presentation had been made to a member of his own family. Lesley touched the books with gentle fingers and reverent eyes. "I have been reading 'The Unexplored,'" she said.

"I knew you would! And I knew you would like it!—I am not wrong?"

"I like it very much. But it is all new to me—so new—I feel like Ione when she first heard of the miseries of England—I have lived in an enchanted world, where everything of that sort was kept from me; so—*how* could I understand?"

"I know! I know!—You make me doubly ashamed of myself. I have lived, metaphorically, in dust and ashes ever since we had that talk together. Miss Brooke, I must have seemed to you the most intolerable prig! Can you ever forgive me for what I said?"

"But," said Lesley, looking straight into his face with her clear brown eyes, "if what you said was true?"

"I had no right to say it."

"That is true," Lesley answered, coldly; and she turned about as though she did not wish to pursue the subject.

"But can you not forgive me for it? I was unjustifiably angry I confess; but since I confess it——"

"Mr. Kenyon, we ought to be going home. I see the woman is waiting to put the lights out."

"We will go home if you like—certainly," said Maurice, in a tone of vexed disappointment. "Take care of the step—yes, here is the door. I am afraid we cannot get a cab in this neighborhood; but as soon as we reach a more civilized locality, I will do my best to find one for you."

By this time they were in the yard. Night had already fallen on the city, whether it had done so in the country or not. The lamps were lighted in the streets; a murky fog had settled like a pall upon the roads; and in the Sun-

day silence the church bells rang out with a mournful cadence which affected Lesley's spirits.

"London is a terrible place," she said, with a little shiver.

"Can you say that," he asked, looking at her curiously, "after seeing the good work that is being done here? If it is a terrible place, it is also a very noble and inspiring one."

"I know I am ignorant," said Lesley, heavily. "It seems terrible to me."

They were silent for a minute or two, for they were passing out of the yard belonging to the "model dwellings," as Macclesfield Buildings were called, into the squalid street beyond; and in avoiding the group of loafers smoking the pipe of idleness, and enjoying the comfortable repose of sloth, Lesley and Mr. Kenyon were so far separated that conversation became impossible.

"You had better take my arm," said Maurice, shortly, almost sternly. "You must, indeed: the place is not fit for you. I ought to have gone out and got a cab."

"Indeed, I do not need it. I can walk quite well. What other people do, I suppose I can do as well."

"Miss Brooke, you have not forgiven me."

Lesley was silent.

"What can I say? I have no justification. I simply let my tongue and my temper run away with me. I am cursed with a hot temper: I do not think before I speak; but I never intended to hurt you, Miss Brooke, I am sure of that."

"No," said Lesley, very quietly, "I understand you. If you had not thought me so stupid as not to see your meaning, or so callous as not to care if I did, you would not have spoken in that way. I don't know that your excuse makes matters much better, Mr. Kenyon. But I am not offended: you need not concern yourself."

"Then you ought to be offended," said Kenyon, doggedly. "And I don't believe you."

"You don't believe me."

"No, indeed I don't."

Lesley's offence was so great now, whatever it had been before, that it deprived her of the power of speech. Her stately head went up: her mouth set itself in straight, hard lines. Maurice saw these tokens, and interpreted them aright.

"Don't be angry with me again. I mean that you could not fail to despise me, to look down on me, for my want

of tact and sense. I thought that you did not understand your father—I was vexed at that, because I have such a respect, such an admiration for him—but I know now that I was mistaken. You ought to be angry with me, for I acknowledge that I spoke impertinently; but having been angry, you can now be merciful and forgive. I apologize from the bottom of my heart.”

“How do you know that I understand my father? Why have you changed your opinion?” said Lesley, coldly. “You have nothing to go upon—just as in the other case you had nothing to go upon. You rushed to one conclusion, if you will excuse me for saying so, and now you rush to another—with no better reason.”

“You are very severe, Miss Brooke,” said Maurice. “But you are perfectly right, and I must not complain. Only—if I may make a representation——”

“Oh, certainly!”

“——I might point out that when I spoke to you first you had not read your father’s book, you had not, I believe, even heard of it; that you knew nothing about the Macclesfield Club, and that when I spoke to you about his work amongst the poor you were very much inclined to murmur, ‘Can any good come out of Nazareth?’”

“Mr. Kenyon——”

“I beg your pardon, Miss Brooke, but isn’t that substantially true? If you can honestly say that it is a misapprehension on my part, I won’t say another word. But isn’t it all true?”

He turned his eager face and bright blue eyes towards her, and read in her pale, troubled face a little of the conflict that was going on between her candor and her pride. “Now, what will she say?” he thought, with what would have seemed to Lesley incomprehensible anxiety. “On her answer depends my opinion of her, now and for ever.”

And this appeared to Maurice quite an important matter, though possibly Lesley might not have thought it so.

She turned to him at last with a frank, decisive gesture.

“It is true,” she said. “I knew nothing about his books or his works, and so how could I appreciate them? I had never heard of ‘The Unexplored’ before. You are right, and I had no business to be so angry. But how do you know that I am different now?”

“Oh, I know you are,” said Maurice, confidently. “You have come to the club for one thing, you see; and you

sang to the people and looked at them—well, as if you cared. And you have read 'The Unexplored' *now?*"

"Yes, I have," said Lesley, hesitatingly.

"And you like it?"

"Yes—I like it." The girl looked away, and went on nervously, hesitatingly. "It is very well done," she said, "It is very clever."

"Oh, if that is all you can find to say about it!"

"But isn't it a great deal?—Mr. Kenyon, I don't know what to say about it. You see I can't be sure whether it is all—true."

"True? The story? But, of course——"

"Of course the *story* is not true. I am not such a goose as that. But is the meaning of it true? the moral, so to speak? Is there so much wickedness in the world as my father says? So much vice and wealth and selfishness on the one side: so much misery and poverty and crime on the other? You are a doctor, and you must have seen a great deal of London life: you ought to know. Is it an exaggeration, or is it true?"

There was such intensity and such pathos in her tones that Kenyon was silent for a minute or two, startled by the vivid reality which she had attached to her father's views and ideas. He could not have answered her lightly, even if it had been in his nature to do so.

"Before God," he said, solemnly, "it is all true—every word of it."

"Then what can we do," said Lesley, gently, "but go down into the midst of it and help?"

Mr. Maurice Kenyon, being a man of ardent temperament, always vows that he lost his heart to Lesley there and then. It is possible that if she had not been a very pretty girl, the most noble of sentiments might have fallen unheeded from her lips; but as she was "so young, so sweet, so delicately fair," Kenyon could not hear his own opinions reciprocated without an answering thrill. How delightful would it be to walk through life with a woman of this kind by one's side! a woman, whose face was a picture, whose every movement a poem, whose soul was as finely touched to fine issues as that of an angel or a saint! All these reflections rushed through his mind in an instant, and it was almost a wonder that he did not blurt some of them out at once. But Lesley went on speaking in a quiet, pensive way.



"I wonder whether I can do anything—while I am here. I shall not have so very long a time, but I might try."

"Not so long a time, Miss Brooke? I thought you had come home for good."

"Only for a year," said Lesley, coloring hotly. "Then I go back to mamma."

Maurice said nothing at first. He felt the hand that rested on his arm tremble slightly, and he knew that he ought to make no more inquiries. But he could not refrain from adding, almost jealously—

"You will be glad of that?"

"Oh, yes! You do not know my mother?" said Lesley, half shyly, half boldly.

"No, I never saw her."

"It is very hard to be so long away from her. She is so sweet and good."

"But you have your father? You are learning to know *him* now."

"Oh, yes, but I want them *both*," said Lesley, with an indescribably gentle and tender intonation. And as they reached Euston Road and were obliged to leave off talking while they threaded their way through the intricacies of vehicular traffic, Mr. Kenyon was revolving in his mind a new idea, namely, the possibility of a reconciliation between Brooke and his wife. He had never thought much about Lady Alice before: she seemed to him to have passed out of Caspar Brooke's life entirely; and if it were not for this link between the two—this sweet and noble-spirited and lovely girl—she would not have been likely to come back into it. But Lesley might perhaps reunite the two, and Maurice's heart began to burn within him with fear for his hero's happiness. Why should any Lady Alice trouble the peace of a worker for mankind like Caspar Brooke?

They did not talk very much more on their way to Upper Woburn Place. They found Ethel and Oliver standing on the steps of Mr. Brooke's house, evidently waiting for the truants. It struck Lesley as she came up that Oliver Trent's brow was ominously dark, and that Ethel's pretty, saucy face wore an expression of something like anxiety or distress.

"We are almost tired of waiting for you, good people," she began merrily. "Fortunately it is fine and warm, or we should have gone and left you to your own devices, as Mr. Brooke and Rosalind have done."

"Where have they gone?" asked Maurice.

"Walked off to her house. Miss Brooke is at home. Lesley, you *are* an imposition! Think of having a voice like that, and keeping it dark all this time."

"We shall requisition Miss Brooke for the club very often, I know that," said Maurice.

"You'll come in with us, Lesley?" Ethel asked.

"No, thank you, Ethel. Not to-day. Thanks."

She wondered a little nervously why Oliver was looking so vexed and—yes, so miserable, too! He seemed terribly out of spirits. Had he and Ethel quarrelled? The thought gave a look of tender inquiry to her eyes as she held out her hand to him. And on meeting that sweet glance, Oliver's face brightened. He had been feeling an unreasonable annoyance with her for walking home with Maurice Kenyon, and had even in his heart called her "a little French flirt." Though why it should matter to him that she was a flirt, did not exactly appear.

They said good-bye to each other, and separated. Maurice went off to see a patient; Oliver accompanied Ethel to her own house; Lesley entered her own home.

She was alone for an hour or two, and, to tell the truth, she felt rather dull. Miss Brooke went away to her circle of select souls, and her father, as she knew, had gone to Mrs. Romaine's. She took out her much-prized volume of "The Unexplored," and began to read it again; wishing that she could talk to her mother about it, and explain to her how really great and good a man her father was. For—she had got as far as this—she was sure that her mother did not understand him. It would have been impossible for him to do a mean, a cruel, a dishonorable action. There had been a misunderstanding somewhere; and Lesley wished, with her whole soul, that she could clear it up.

The sound of the opening and closing of the front door did not arouse her from her dreams. She read on, holding the little paper-covered volume on her lap, deep in deepest thought, until the door of the drawing-room opened rather suddenly, and her father walked in.

It was an unusual hour at which to see him in the drawing-room, and Lesley looked up in surprise. Then, half unconsciously, half timidly, she drew her filmy embroidered handkerchief over the book in her lap. She had a shy dislike to letting her father see what she was reading.

He did not seem, however, to take any notice of her occupation. He walked straight to an arm-chair on the opposite side of the hearth, sat down, stretching out his long legs, and placing his elbows on the arms of the chair. The unruly lock of hair, which no hairdresser could tame, had fallen right across his broad brow, and heightened the effect of a very undeniable frown. Mr. Caspar Brooke was in anything but an amiable temper.

It was with a laudable attempt, however, to keep the displeasure out of his voice that he said at length—

“I thought I understood you to say, Lesley, that you were not musical!”

The color flushed Lesley's face to the very roots of her hair.

“I do not think I am—very musical,” she said, trying to answer bravely. “I play the piano very little.”

“Of course you must know that that is a quibble,” said Mr. Brooke, dryly. “A talent for music does not confine itself solely to the piano. I presume that you have been told that you have a good voice?”

“Yes, I have been told so.”

“And you have had lessons?”

“Yes, a few.”

“Then may I ask what was your motive for declining to take lessons in London when I asked to do so? You even went so far as to make use of a subterfuge: you gave me to understand that you had no musical power at all, and that you knew nothing and could do nothing?”

He paused as if he expected a reply; but Lesley did not say a word.

“I cannot understand it,” Mr. Brooke went on; “but,”—after a pause—“I suppose there is no reason why I should. I did not come to say anything much about that part of the business. I came rather to suggest that as you have a good voice, it is wrong not to cultivate it. And your lessons will give you something to do. It seems to me rather a pity, my dear, that you should do nothing but sit round and read novels—which, your aunt tells me, is your principal occupation. Suppose you try to find something more useful to do?”

He spoke with a smile now and in a softer voice; but Lesley was much too hurt and depressed to say a word. He looked at her steadfastly for a minute or two, and decided that she was sullen.

"I will see about the lessons for you," he said, getting up and speaking decidedly, "and I hope you will make the most of your opportunities. How much time have you been in the habit of devoting to your singing every day?"

"An hour and a half," said Lesley, in a very low voice.

"And you left off practising as soon as you came here? That was a great pity; and you must allow me to say, Lesley, very silly into the bargain. Surely your own conscience tells you that it was wrong? A voice like yours is not meant to be hidden."

Lesley wished that at that moment she could find any voice at all. She sat like a statue, conscious only of an effort to repress her tears. And Mr. Brooke, having said all that he wanted to say, took up a book, and thought how difficult it was to manage women who met remonstrances in silence.

Lesley got up in a few moments and walked quietly out of the room. But she forgot her book. It fell noiselessly on the soft fur rug, and lay there, with leaves flattened and back bent outwards. Caspar Brooke was one of the people who cannot bear to see a book treated with anything less than reverence. He picked it up, straightened the leaves, and looked casually at the title. It was "The Unexplored."

He held it for a minute, gazing before him with wide eyes as if he were troubled or perplexed. Then he shook his head, sighed, smiled, and put it down upon the nearest table. "Poor little girl!" he said. "I wonder if I frightened her at all!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

AT MRS. ROMAINÉ'S.

THE reason why Caspar Brooke spoke somewhat sharply to Lesley was not far to seek. He had been to Mrs. Romainé's house to tea. The sequence of cause and effect can easily be conjectured.

"How charmingly your daughter sang!" Mrs. Romainé began, when she had got Mr. Brooke into his favorite corner, and given him a cup of her best China tea.

"Yes, she sang very well," said Brooke, carelessly.

"I had no idea that she *could* sing! Why, by the bye—did you not tell me that she said she was not musical?—declined singing lessons, and so on?"

"Yes, I think I said so. Yes, she did."

"She must be very modest!" said Mrs. Romainé, lifting her eyebrows.

"I don't know—I fancy she did not want to be indebted to me for more than she could help."

Mrs. Romainé looked pained, and kept for a few moments a pained silence.

"My poor friend!" she said at last. "This is very sad! Could she"—and Brooke knew that the pronoun referred to Lady Alice, not to Lesley—"could she not be content with abandoning you, without poisoning your daughter's mind against you?"

Caspar said nothing. He leaned forward, tea-cup in hand, and studied the carpet. It was, perhaps, hard for him to find a suitable reply.

"It is too much," Rosalind continued, with increasing energy. "You have taken not a daughter, but an enemy into your house. She sits and criticizes all you do—sends accounts to her mother, doubtless, of all your comings and goings. She looks upon you as a tyrant, and a disreputable person, too. She has been taught to hate you, and she carries out the teaching—oh, I can see it in every line of her face, every inflection of her voice: she has been

taught to loathe you, my poor, misjudged friend, and she does not disguise her loathing ! ”

It is not quite pleasant for a man to hear that his daughter hates him, and makes no secret of the hatred. Caspar immediately concluded that Lesley had made some outspoken remarks upon the subject to Mrs. Romaine. Secretly he felt hurt and angry : outwardly he smiled.

“ What would you have ? ” he said, lightly but bitterly. “ Lady Alice has no doubt indoctrinated her daughter, as you say ; all that I can expect from Lesley is civility. And I generally get that. ”

“ Civility ? Between father and daughter ? When she ought to be proud of such a father—proud of all that you are, and all that you have done ! She should be adoring you, slaving for you, ready to sacrifice herself at your smallest word—and see what she is ! A machine, silent, useless, unwilling—from whom all that you can claim is—civility ! Oh, women are capable sometimes of taking a terrible revenge ! ”

She threw her hands out with a gesture of despair and deprecation, which was really fine in its way ; then she rose from her chair, went to the mantelpiece, and stood with her face bent upon her clasped hands. Caspar rose too, and stood on the hearthrug beside her, looking down at the pretty ruffled head, with something very like affection in his eye.

He did not quite understand this emotion of hers, but its sincerity touched as well as puzzled him. For she was sincere as far as he was concerned, and this sincerity gave her a certain amount of power, such as sincerity always gives. The ring of true feeling in her voice could not be counterfeited, and Caspar was flattered by it, as any man would have been flattered at having excited so much sympathy in the heart of a talented and beautiful woman.

He knew that Alice had been jealous of Rosalind Romaine, but, he thought, quite unreasonably so. Poor Rosalind, tied to a dry old stick of a husband to whom she did her duty most thoroughly, was naturally glad to talk now and then to a man who knew something of Art and Life. That was simple enough, and he had been glad of her interest and sympathy, especially as these were denied to him by his wife. There was nothing for Lady Alice to be jealous about. And he had dismissed the matter impatiently from

his thoughts. Alice had left him because she hated his opinions, his manner of life, his profession—not because she was jealous of Rosalind Romaine. But Rosalind knew better.

The woman's sympathy affected him so far, however, that, after standing silent for a minute or two, he laid his hand softly upon her arm. It was a foolish thing to do, but then Caspar Brooke was never a particularly wise man, in spite of his goodness of heart and fertility of brain. And Rosalind felt, by the thrill that ran through her at his touch, that she had gained more from him than she had ever gained before. What would he say next?

Well, he did not say very much. "Your sympathy, Rosalind," he said, "is very pleasant—very dear to me. But you must not give me too much of it. Sympathy is enervating, as other men have found before me!"

"May I not offer you mine?" she said, plaintively. "It is so hard to be silent! If only I could make Lesley understand what you are—how noble—how good——"

Caspar laughed, and took away his hand.

"Don't talk to her about me; it would do no good," he said.

He stood in the firelight, looking so massive, so stern, so resolved, that Mrs. Romaine lost herself for a moment in admiration of his great frame and leonine head. And as she paused he spoke again.

"I have not lately observed much hostility to myself in Lesley's demeanor," he said. "At first, of course—but lately—well, I have been more struck by a sort of languor, a want of interest and comprehension, than anything else. No doubt she feels that she is in a new world——"

"Ah yes, a world of intellect and activity to which she has not been accustomed," said Mrs. Romaine, briskly. Since Caspar had removed his hand she had been standing erect, watchfully observant of him. It was by his moods that she intended to regulate her own. "I suppose she has been accustomed to nothing but softness and self-indulgence; and she does not understand this larger life to which she now has access."

"Poor child!" said Mr. Brooke.

But this was not at all the remark that Mrs. Romaine wanted him to make. She tried to beat back the tide of paternal affection that was evidently setting in.

"She wants rousing I am afraid. She ought not to be allowed to sink into a dreamy, listless state. It must be very trying for you to see it; you must be pained by the selfishness and waywardness from which it proceeds——"

"Do you think it does?" said Mr. Brooke, almost wistfully. "I should be sorry to think Lesley selfish. Sophy says that she is more ignorant than selfish."

"But what is ignorance save a form of selfishness?" cried Rosalind, indignantly. "She might know if she chose! She does know the common duties of humanity, the duty of every man or woman to labor for others, to gain knowledge, to make broad the borders of light! Oh, I cannot bear to hear ignorance alleged as an excuse for self-love! It is impossible that any one with Lesley's faculties should not see her duty, even if she is idle and indifferent enough to let it pass when she does see it."

Mr. Brooke sat down, regardless of the fact that Mrs. Romaine was standing, and looked at the carpet again with a sigh.

"You may be right," he said, in a pained tone; "but if so, what am I to do?"

"You must speak to her," said Rosalind, energetically. "You must tell her not to be idle and obstinate and wayward: you must show her her duty, so that she may have no excuse for neglecting it."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That's not a man's duty, it seems to me. Woman to woman, man to man. I wish you would do it, Rosalind!"

"Oh, no; I have not a *mother's* right," said she, softly.

But the remark had an effect which she had not anticipated.

"That is true. It is a mother who should tell a girl her duty. Poor Lesley's mother has not done all that she might do in that respect. Our unhappy quarrel has caused her to represent me to the girl in very dark colors, I believe. But I have lately been wondering whether that might not be amended. Did you hear that man's taunt this afternoon—about the wife that had left me? I can't endure that sort of thing. Think of the harm it does. And then the child must needs go and sing 'Home, Sweet Home.' To me, whose home was broken up by *her* mother. I had the greatest possible difficulty in sitting through that song, Rosalind. And I said to myself that I was a great fool to put up with this state of things."



His sentences were unusually short, his tones abrupt ; both covered an amount of agitation which Mrs. Romaine had not expected to see. She sat down and remained silent and motionless : she even held her breath, not well knowing what to expect. Presently he resumed, in a lower tone—

"I know that if I alter existing arrangements I shall give myself some pain and discomfort, and inflict more, perhaps, upon others ; but I think this is inevitable. I am determined, if possible, to end my solitary life, and the solitary life also of a woman who is—I may say it now—dear to me." He spoke with deliberate gravity. Mrs. Romaine's pulses beat faster : the hot color began to steal into her cheeks. "I never wished to inflict pain upon her. I have always regretted the years of separation and loneliness that we have both spent. So I have resolved—perhaps that is too strong a word—I am thinking of asking her to share my home with me again."

"Again?" The word escaped Rosalind's lips before she knew that she had spoken.

"Yes, once again," said Caspar, quite unconscious of her emotion. "We did not get on very well when we lived together, but we are older now, and I think that if we made a fresh start it *might* be possible—I wonder if Alice would consent?"

There was a moment's pause. Then—"You think of asking Lady Alice to come back to you?" said Mrs. Romaine, in a hard, measured voice, which made Caspar look at her with some transient feeling of surprise. But he put down the change of tone to her astonishment at his proposition, and went on unmoved.

"I thought of it—yes. It would be much better for Lesley."

"Are you so devoted to Lesley that you want to sacrifice your whole life for her?" asked Rosalind, in the same hard, strained voice.

"My whole life? Well, no—but you exaggerate, Rosalind. I do not sacrifice my whole life by having my wife and daughter in my house."

"That is plausibly said. But one has to consider what sort of wife and daughter yours are, and what part of your life will have to be devoted to them."

Brooke sat and stroked his beard. He began to wish that he had not mentioned his project to Mrs. Romaine. But he could not easily tell her to hold her tongue.

"I am not going to presume," said Rosalind, "to say anything unkind—anything harsh of your wife: I know I have not the right, and I know that you would—very properly—resent it. So don't be afraid. But I only want to remind you that Lady Alice is not even where she was when, as an over-sensitive, easily-offended girl, she fled from you. She has had twelve years of life under conditions differing most entirely from yours. She has lived in the fashionable world—a world which of all others you dislike. What sympathy can there be between you? She may be perfect in her own line, but it is not your line: you are different; and you will never be happy together."

"That is a hard thing to say, Rosalind."

"It will be a harder thing for you if you try it. Believe me, Caspar"—her voice trembled as she used his Christian name, which she very seldom did—"believe me that if it would be for your happiness I would welcome the change! But when I remember the discord, the incompatibility, the want of sympathy, which used to grieve me in those old days, I cannot think——"

She stopped short, and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Lady Alice could not understand you—could not appreciate you," she said. "And it was hard—hard for your friends to look on and say—*nothing!*"

Brooke rose abruptly from his chair. "No one ever had a truer friend than I have in you," he said, huskily. "But it seems to me that Alice may have changed with the lapse of years; she may have become easier to satisfy, better able to sympathize——"

"Does she show that spirit in the way she has spoken of you to your daughter? What do you gather from Lesley as to her state of mind?" said Mrs. Romaine, keenly.

He paused. She knew very well that the question was a hard one for him to answer.

"Ah," he said, with a heavy sigh, "you know as well as I do."

Then he turned aside, and for an instant or two there was a silence.

"I suppose it would not be wise," he continued, at last. "But I wish that it could have been done. It would be

better in many ways. A man and wife ought to live together. A girl ought to live with her parents. We are all in false positions. And, perhaps, if any one is to be sacrificed, it ought to be myself," he said, with a curious smile.

"You forget," said Mrs. Romaine with emotion, "that you sacrifice others in sacrificing yourself."

"Others? No, I don't think so. You allude to my sister?"

"No—not your sister."

"Sophy could go on living with us and managing the household affairs," said Brooke, who had no conception of what poor Mrs. Romaine meant; "and she is not a person who would willingly interfere with other people's views or opinions. Indeed, she carries the *laissez-faire* principle almost to an extreme. Sophy is no proselytizer, thank God!"

"I did not mean Sophy: I meant your friends—old friends like myself," said Rosalind, desperately. "You will cast us all off—you will forget us—forget—*me*!"

There was unusual passion in her voice. Then she hid her face in her hands and burst into tears. Brooke made two steps towards her, and stopped short.

"Rosalind!" he exclaimed. "You cannot think that! you cannot think that I shall ever forget old friends!"

Then he halted, and stood looking down at her, and biting his beard, which he was crushing up to his lips with one hand, after his fashion when he was embarrassed or perplexed. Some glimmer of the truth had begun to manifest itself to him. A hot, red flush crossed his brow.

"Rosalind," he said, in a softer but also a colder tone, "you must not take this matter so much to heart. Rest assured that I—and my wife, if she comes back, and my daughter also—will always look upon you as a very dear and valued friend."

"I am so alone in the world," she said, wiping away her tears and slightly lifting her head. "I cannot bear to think that the day will come when I——"

She paused—perhaps purposely. But Caspar was resolved to treat the subject more lightly now.

"When you are without friends? Oh, that will never be. You are too kind and sympathetic to be without as many friends as you choose to have."

"And you—yourself——"

"Oh, I am of a very constant disposition," he said, cheerfully. "I suppose it is for that reason that I want Alice back. You know that in spite of all our disagreements, I have always held to it that I never saw a woman half as charming, half as attractive, as Alice."

This was a speech not calculated to soothe Mrs. Romaine's wounded feelings, or to implant in her a liking for Lady Alice. For Mrs. Romaine was not very generous, and she was irritated by the thought that she had betrayed her own secret. She rose to her feet at once, with a quick and rather haughty gesture.

"You are indeed a model of constancy," she said. "Some men would resent insults, even if offered to them by wives. You are capable, it seems, of much forgetfulness and much forgiveness."

"Do you think that a fault?" asked Brooke, calmly.

Her mood changed at once. She burst into a shrill little laugh.

"Oh, not at all. Most convenient—for the wife. There is one danger—you may incur the censure of more worldly men; but then you are too high-minded to care for that!"

Caspar shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I think I can take care of myself," he said, good-humoredly. "And now I must go. Pray don't distress yourself on my account. I will not do anything rash."

They stood facing each other, she with her eyes down, he looking straight into her face. Some instinct told her not to break the spell by looking up. There was a conflict going on in Caspar Brooke's mind—a conflict between pity (not love) and duty. He was a tender-hearted man, and it would have been very easy to him just then to have given her some friendly, comforting words, or even——"

Yes, he acknowledged to himself, he would have liked to kiss those soft lips of hers, those downcast eyelids, slightly reddened by recent tears! And he did not think that she would resent the caress.

But how could he ask his wife to return to him if he did this thing? As he had indicated by his words, he still loved Lady Alice. He had the courage to be faithful to her, too. For Caspar Brooke was a man of strong convictions, steadfast will, and stainless honor. However great the temptation might be, he was not going to do a thing that he knew he should afterwards regret.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Romaine."

"Good-bye, Mr. Brooke."

So they took leave of each other ; and Rosalind went to bed with a bad headache, while Caspar Brooke returned home to find fault with his daughter Lesley.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE WIFE OF FRANCIS TRENT.

FAR away from the eminently respectable quarter of London, adorned by the habitation of families like the Brookes, the Kenyons, and the Romaines, you may find an unsavory district in Whitechapel which is known as Truefit Row. It is a street of tall and mean-looking houses, which seem to be tottering to their fall ; and the pavement is strewn with garbage which is seldom cleared away. Many of the windows of the houses are broken ; many of the doors hang ajar, for the floors are let out in flats, and there is a common stair for at least five and twenty families. It is a dreary-looking place, and the dwellers therein look as dreary as their own abode.

In one of these houses Mr. Francis Trent had found a resting-place for the sole of his foot. It was not a fashionable lodging, not even a particularly clean one ; but he had come down in the world, and did not very much care where he lived, so long as he had plenty to drink, and a little money in his pockets. But these commodities were not as plentiful as he wanted them to be. Therefore he passed a good deal of his time in a state of chronic brooding and discontent.

He had one room on the third storey. The woodwork of this apartment was so engrained with grime that scarcely any amount of washing would have made it look clean ; but it had certainly been washed within a comparatively recent date. The wall paper, which had peeled off in certain places, had also been repaired by a careful hand ; and the curtains which shaded the unbroken window were almost spotlessly clean. By several other indications it was quite plain that a woman's hand had lately been busy in the room ; and compared with many other rooms in the same building, it was quite a palace of cleanliness and comfort.

But Francis Trent did not think so. He sat over his small and smouldering fire one dark November afternoon,

and shivered, partly from cold and partly from disgust. He had no coals left, and no money wherewith to buy them: a few sticks and some coke and cinders were the materials out of which he was trying to make a fire, and naturally the result was not very inspiring. The kettle, which was standing on the dull embers, showed not the slightest inclination to "sing." Francis Trent, outstretched on a basket-chair (the only comfortable article of furniture that the room contained), gave the fire an occasional stir with his foot, and bestowed upon it a deal of invective.

"It will be out directly," he said at last, sitting up and looking dismally about him; "and it's nearly five o'clock. She said she would be here at four. Ugh! how cold it is! If she doesn't come in five minutes I shall go to the Spotted Dog. There's always a fire there, thank goodness, and they'll stand me a glass of something hot, I daresay."

He rose and walked about the room by way of relieving the monotony of existence, and causing his blood to circulate a little faster. But this mode of activity did not long please him, and he threw himself back in his chair at last, and uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Confound it! I shall go out," he said to himself.

But just at that moment a hand fumbled at the latch. He called out "Come in," an unnecessary call, because the door was half open before he spoke, and a woman entered the room, shutting the door behind her.

She was slight, trim, not very tall: she had a pale face and dark eyes, dark, glossy hair, and delicate features. If Lesley had been there, she would have recognized in this woman ~~the~~ the ladies' maid who called herself Mary Kingston. But in this part of the world she was known as Mrs. Trent.

Francis did not give her a warm welcome, and yet his weak, worn face lighted up a little at the sight of her. "I thought you were never coming," he said, grumblingly, and his eyes fell greedily to the basket that she carried on her arm. "What have you got there?"

"Just a few little things for your tea," said Mary, depositing the basket on the table. "And, oh—what a wretched fire! Have you no coals?"

"Neither coals nor food nor drink," he answered, suddenly, "nor money in my pocket either."

The woman stood and looked at him. "You had two pounds the day before yesterday," she said.

"Billiards," he answered, laconically. But he turned away so as not to see her face.

She gave a short, sharp exclamation. "You promised to be careful!"

"The luck was against me," he said. "I thought I should win, but my hand's taken to shaking so much that I couldn't play. I don't see why you should blame me—I've precious few amusements."

She did not answer, but began to take the parcels, one by one, from her basket, and place them on the table. Her own hands shook a little as she did so. Francis turned again to watch her operations. She took out some tea, bread, butter, eggs, and bacon. There was a bottle of brandy and a bundle of cigars. Francis Trent's eyes glistened at the sight. He stole closer to his wife, and put his arm around her.

"You're a good soul, Mary. You'll forgive me, won't you? Upon my honor, I never meant to lose the money."

"I have to work hard enough for it," she said dryly.

"I know you have! It's a shame—a d——d shame! If I had my way, you should be dressed in satin, and sit all day with your hands before you, and ride in your own carriage—you know you should!"

"I don't know that I should particularly care about that kind of life," said Mary, still coldly, but with a perceptible softening of her eye and relaxation of the stiff upper lip. "I would rather live on a farm in the country, and do farm-work. It's healthier, yes, and it's happier—to my thinking."

"So it is; and that's the life we'll lead by and by, when Oliver pays us what he has promised," said Francis, eagerly. "We will have some land of our own, and get far away from the temptation of the city. Then you will see what a different fellow I'll be, Mary. You shan't have reason to complain of me then."

"Well, I hope so, Francis," she said, but not too hopefully. Perhaps she noticed that his hand and eye both strayed, as if involuntarily, towards the bottle of spirits on the table. And at that moment, the last flicker of light from the fire went out.

"Have you no candles?" she asked, abruptly.

"Not one."

"I'll go out and fetch them, and some coal too. Sit down quietly, and wait. I won't be long. And as I



haven't a corkscrew, I'll take the bottle with me, and get it opened downstairs."

Francis dared not object, but his wife's course of action made him sulky. He did not see why she should not have left him the bottle during her absence: he could have broken its neck on the fender. But he knew very well that she could not trust him to drink only in moderation if he were left alone with the bottle; and, like a wise woman, she therefore took it with her.

She was back again in a few minutes, bringing with her fuel and lights. Francis was lying in his bed, his face turned sullenly to the wall. Mary poured a little brandy into a glass, and brought it to him to drink.

"You will feel better when you have had that," she said, "and you shall have some more in your tea if you want it. Now, I'm going to light up the fire."

So well did she perform her task that in a very short time the flames were leaping up the chimney, the shadows dancing cheerfully over the ceiling, the kettle hissing and puffing on the fire. The sight and sound drew Francis once more from his bed to the basket chair, where he sat and lazily watched his wife as she cut bread, made tea, fried bacon and eggs, with the ease and celerity of a woman to whom domestic offices are familiar. When at last the tea-table was arranged, he drew up his chair to it with a sigh of positive pleasure.

"How homelike and comfortable it looks: Why don't you always stay with me, Mary, and keep me straight?"

"You want so much keeping straight, Francis," she said, but a slight smile flickered about the corners of her lips.

It was characteristic of the pair that he allowed her to wait on him, hand and foot: he let her cut the bread, pour out the tea, carry his plate backwards and forwards, and pour the brandy into his cup, without a word of remonstrance. Only when he had been well supplied and was not likely to want anything more just then, did he say to her—

"Sit down, Mary, and get yourself a cup of tea."

Mary did not seem to resent the condescending nature of this invitation. She thanked him simply, and sat down; pouring out for herself the dregs of the tea, and eating a piece of dry bread with it. Francis had the grace to remonstrate with her on the poverty of her fare.

"It doesn't matter what I eat now," she said. "I have the best of everything where I'm living, and I don't feel hungry."

"I hope you're comfortable where you are," said Mr. Trent, politely.

"Yes, I'm very comfortable, thank you, Francis. Though," said Mrs. Trent, deliberately, "I think I should be more comfortable if I wasn't in a house where Mr. Oliver visited."

"Oliver! Do you mean my brother Oliver? Why do you call him *Mr.* Oliver? It is so absurd to keep up these class-distinctions."

"So I think," said Mary, "but when other people keep them up it's not much use for me to be the first to cast them over board. Your brother Oliver comes to the house where I'm living much oftener than I think he ought."

"What house is it? You never told me."

"It's Mr. Brooke's. Mr. Caspar Brooke—him as wrote 'The Unexplored.' I brought it to you to read, I remember—a good long time ago."

"Awful rot it was too!" said Francis, contemptuously. "However, I suppose it paid. What are you doing there? Wasn't it his wife who ran away from him? I remember the row some years ago—before I went under. Is she dead?"

"No, she's living with her father, Lord Courtleroy. It's her daughter I've come to wait on: Miss Lesley Brooke."

"Brooke's daughter!" said Francis, thoughtfully. "I remember Brooke. Not half a bad fellow. Lent me ten pounds once, and never asked for it again. So it's *Brooke's* daughter you—hm—live with. Sort of companion, you are, eh, Mary?"

"Maid," said Mary, stolidly. "Ladies' maid. And Miss Lesley's the sweetest young lady I ever come across."

Francis shrugged his shoulders. "Your employment is causing you to relapse into the manner—and grammar—of your original station, Mary. May I suggest 'came' instead of 'come'?"

Mrs. Trent looked at him with a still disdain.

"Suggest what you like," she said, "and think what you like of me. I never took myself to be your equal in education and all that. I may be your equal in *sense* and

heart and morals ; but of course that goes for nothing with such as you."

"Don't be savage, Mary," said Francis, in a conciliatory tone. "I only want you to improve yourself a little, when you can. You're the best woman in the world—nobody knows it better than I do—and you should not take offense at a trifle. So you like Brooke's daughter, eh?"

"Yes, I like her. But I don't like your brother Oliver."

"I know that. What is he doing at Brooke's house? Let me see—he isn't engaged to *that* girl? It's the actress he's going to marry, isn't it?"

He had finished his meal by this time, and was smoking one of the cigars that his wife had brought him. She, meanwhile, turned up her sleeves, and made ready to wash the cups and plates.

"Tell me all about it," said Francis, who was now in high good humor. "It sounds quite like the beginning of a romance."

"There's no romance about it that I can see," said Mrs. Trent, grimly. "Your brother is engaged to Miss Kenyon—a nice, pretty young lady: rich, too, I hear."

"Yes, indeed! As you and I are going to find out by and by, old lady," and he chuckled to himself at the thought of his prospective wealth.

"And he ought to be content with that. Instead of which, he's never out of our place; and when he's there he never seems to take his eyes off Miss Lesley. Playing the piano while she sings, reading to her, whispering, sitting into her pocket, so to speak. I can't think what he's about, nor other people neither."

"What does Miss Kenyon say?" asked Francis, with sudden sharpness. For it occurred to him that if that match were broken off he would not get his two thousand pounds on Oliver's wedding-day.

"She doesn't seem to notice much. Once or twice lately I've seen her look at them in a thoughtful, puzzled kind of way, as if something had set her thinking. She looks at Miss Lesley as if she could not quite make her out—though the two have been friends ever since Miss Lesley came home from school."

"And the girl herself?" said Francis, with considerable and increasing interest. "What does she do?"

"She looks troubled and puzzled, but I don't think she understands. She's as innocent as a baby," said Mrs. Trent, with compassion in her tone.

"I wonder what he's doing it for," soliloquized Francis. "He can't marry her."

Mary Trent paused for a moment in her housewifely occupations. "Why *can* he not?"

"Because—well, I may as well tell you as not. I've never mentioned it—I don't know why exactly—but I'll tell you now, Mary. A few weeks ago, when we were so down on our luck, you know—just before you began to work again—I met Oliver in Russell Square, and told him what I wanted and what I thought of him. I brought him to terms, I can tell you! He had just got himself engaged to Miss Kenyon; and she has twenty thousand pounds besides her profession; and he promised me two thousand down on his wedding-day. What do you say to that? And within six months, too! And if he doesn't keep his word, I shall not hold my tongue about the one or two little secrets of his that I possess—do you see?"

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Trent, slowly, "he thinks he could manage to pay you the money even if he married Miss Brooke? So long as you get the two thousand, I suppose you don't mind which girl it is?"

"Not a bit," answered her husband frankly. "All I want is the money. Then we'll go off to America, old girl, and have the farm you talk about. But Brooke's daughter won't have two thousand pounds, so if he marries her instead of Miss Kenyon, he'll have to look out."

Mrs. Trent had finished her work by this time. As she stood by the table drying her hands there was a look of fixed determination on her features which Francis recognized with some uneasiness.

"What do you think about it? What are you going to do?" he asked, almost timidly.

"I am not going to see Miss Lesley badly treated, at any rate."

"How can you prevent it?"

"I don't know, but I *shall* prevent it, please God, if necessary. Your brother Oliver is engaged to one girl, and making love to another, that's the plain English of it; and sooner than see him break Miss Lesley's heart, I'd up and tell everybody what I know of him, and get him turned out of the house."

"And spoil my game?" cried Francis, rising to his feet. His faced had turned white with anger, and his eyes were aflame. She looked at him consideringly, as if she were measuring his strength against her own.

"Well—no," she said at length, "I won't spoil your game if I can help it—and I think I can get my own way without doing that. I want you to win your game, Francis. For you know"—with a weary smile—"that if you win, I win too."

"Her husband's face relaxed. "You're not a bad sort, Polly: I always said so," he remarked. "Come and give me a kiss. You wouldn't do anything rash, would you? Choke Oliver off at Brooke's as much as you like; but don't endanger his relations with Ethel Kenyon. His marriage with her is our only chance of getting out of this accursed bog we seem to have stuck fast in."

"I'll be careful," said Mrs. Trent, drily.

Francis still eyed her with apprehension. "You won't try to stop that marriage, will you?"

"No, why should I? Miss Kenyon's nothing to me."

Francis laughed. "I didn't know where your sympathies might be carrying you," he said. "Brooke's daughter is no more to you than the other girl."

"I suppose not. But I feel different to her. You can't explain these things," said Mrs. Trent, philosophically, "but it's certain sure that you take a liking to one person and a hate to another, without knowing why. I liked Miss Lesley ever since I entered that house. She's kind, and talks to me as if I was a woman—not a machine. And I wouldn't like to see any harm happen to her."

"Oh, you may indulge your romantic fondness for Miss Brooke as long as you like, if you don't let it interfere with Oliver's marriage," said Francis, with a rather disagreeable laugh. "It's lucky that you did not go to live with Miss Kenyon instead of the fair Lesley. You might have felt tempted to tell *her* your little story."

"Ay, so I might," said the woman, slowly. "For she's a woman, after all. And a nice life she'll have of it with Oliver Trent. I'm not sure——"

She stopped, and a sombre light came into her deep-set eyes.

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't get on that old grievance," said Francis, hastily, almost rudely. "Don't think

about it—don't mention it to me. It's all very well, Polly, for you to take on so much about your sister ; and, indeed, I'm very sorry for her, and I think that Oliver behaved abominably—I do, indeed ; but, my dear girl, it's no good crying over spilt milk, and Oliver's my brother, after all——”

“ And he's going to pay you two thousand pounds on his wedding-day,” said Mrs. Trent, with cruel curtness. “ I know all about it. And I understand. Why should I be above making my profit out of him like other people ? All right, Francis : I won't spoil your little game at present. And now I must be getting back.”

She took up her bonnet and shawl and began to readjust them. Francis watched her hands : he saw that they trembled, and he knew that this was an ominous sign. It sometimes betokened anger, and when she was angry he did not care to ask her to give him money. And he wanted money now.

But she was not angry in the way that he thought. For after a moment's silence her hands grew steady again, and her face recovered its usual calm.

“ I've got three pounds here for you, Francis,” she said. “ And I hope you'll make it last as long as you can—you will, won't you ? For I shan't have any more for some little time to come.”

He nodded and took the sovereigns from her hand. A touch of compunction visited him as he did so.

“ Keep one, Polly,” he said. “ I don't want them all.”

“ Oh, yes, you do. And I have no need of money where I am. You'll not spend it all at billiards, or on brandy, will you ? ”

“ No, Polly, I won't. I promise you.”

And he meant to keep his promise. But as matters fell out, he was blindly, madly drunk before the same night was out, and he had lost every penny that he possessed over a game at cards. And plunging recklessly across the street, in the darkness of the foggy night, he was knocked down by a passing cab, and was carried insensible to the nearest hospital. Where let us leave him for a time in good and kindly hands.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"HER EYES WILL SEND ME MAD."

It was true, as Mrs. Trent had said, that Lesley's face often now wore a look of perplexity and trouble. This look had many differing causes ; but amongst them, not the least was the behavior of Oliver Trent.

Oliver was betrothed to her friend, and she had so much faith in the honor and constancy of men, that it never occurred to her that he could prefer herself to Ethel, or that he should think of behaving as though Ethel were not the first person in the world to him. But as a matter of fact, he did not conduct himself to Ethel at all as a lover should have done. Assured of her love, he neglected her : he failed to appear at the Theatre in time to escort her home, he forgot his promises to visit her ; he let her notes lie unanswered in his pocket. And when she pouted and remonstrated, he frowned her into silence, which was not at all the way in which her lover ought to behave.

Of course Lesley did not know this, for Ethel had not taken her into her confidence on the subject. But she knew very well where Oliver spent his time. Early and late, on small excuse or on no excuse at all, he presented himself at Mr. Brooke's house, and made himself Lesley's companion. At first Lesley did not dislike it. She supposed that Ethel must be busy with her theatrical studies, or at rehearsal, and that Oliver was in want of something to do. It was pleasant to have the companionship of some one younger and more congenial, perhaps, than her father or Miss Brooke ; and she gained a great deal of interesting information from Oliver during the long hours that he spent with her in the drawing-room or library. He told her a great deal about London society, about modern literature, and the fashions of the day ; and all this was as fascinating to Lesley as it was novel. He talked to her about plays and music and pictures ; and he read poetry

to her. Modern poetry, of course : a little Browning, and a good deal of Rossetti and Swinburne. For amorous and passionate poetry pleased him best ; and he knew that it was likelier to serve his ends than verse of the more masculine and intellectual kind. Lesley rather preferred Browning and Arnold to Oliver's favorites, but she was never certain of her own taste, and was always humbly afraid that she might be making some terrible mistake in her preferences.

She certainly found Mr. Trent's aid very valuable in the matter of her singing. The best singing-mistress in London had been found for her, and she practised diligently every day ; but it was delightful to find somebody who could always play her accompaniments, and was ready with discriminating praise or almost more flattering criticism. Oliver had considerable musical knowledge, and he placed it at Lesley's service. She made a much quicker and more marked advance in her singing than she could possibly have done without his assistance. And for this she was grateful.

At the same time she was uneasy. It was contrary to all her previous experience that a young man should be allowed to spend so much time with her. She did not think that her mother would approve of it. But she could not ask Lady Alice, because she had now no communication with her ; a purely formal letter respecting her health and general welfare was all, she had been told, that she would be permitted to write. And sooner than write a letter of that kind Lesley had proudly resolved not to write at all. But she pined for womanly counsel and assistance in the matter.

Miss Brooke was certainly not proving herself an efficient chaperon. Aunt Sophy had never risen to a clear view of her duty in the matter. She herself had never been chaperoned in her life ; but had gone about to lectures and dissecting rooms and hospitals with a fine indifference to sex. But then Doctor Sophy had never been a pretty woman ; and no young man had shown a wish to spend his spare hours in her drawing-room. She had a strong belief in the wisdom and goodness of women—young and old—and declared that they could always take care of themselves when they chose. And nothing would induce her to believe that her niece, Lesley Brooke, required protection or guar-



dianship. She would have thought it an insult to her own family to suggest such a thing.

So she treated Lesley's rather timidly worded suggestions on the subject with cheerful contempt, as the conventional notions of a convent-bred young woman who had not yet realized the strides made in the progress of mankind—and especially of womankind. And Lesley soon felt quite sure that any complaint or protest of hers would be dealt with simply as a sign of weak-mindedness—a stigma which she could not endure. So she said nothing, and submitted to Oliver Trent's frequent visits with resignation.

It must be said, however, that Aunt Sophy had not the least notion of the frequency of Oliver's visits. She was a busy woman, and a somewhat absent-minded one; and Mr. Trent often contrived to call when she was out or engaged. And when she asked, as she sometimes did ask of Sarah—"Any one called to-day?"—and received the grim answer—"Only Mr. Trent, as usual"—she simply laughed at Sarah's sour visage, and did not calculate the number of these visits in the week. Mr. Brooke himself grew uncomfortable about the matter, sooner than did Miss Brooke.

"Sophy," he said, one day, when he happened to find her alone in the library, sitting at the very top of the library steps, with an immense volume of German science on her knees. "Sophy, have you noticed that young Trent has taken to coming here very often of late?"

"No," said Doctor Sophy, absently, "I haven't noticed." Then she went on reading.

"My dear Sophy," said her brother, "will you do me the kindness to listen to me for a moment?"

"Why, Caspar, I *am* listening as hard as I can!" exclaimed Miss Brooke, with an injured air. "What do you want?"

"I wish to speak about Lesley."

"Oh, I thought it was Mr. Trent."

"Does it not strike you that he comes here to see Lesley a great deal too often?"

"Rubbish," cried Miss Brooke, pushing up her eyeglasses. "Why, he's engaged to Ethel Kenyon."

"For all that," said Mr. Brooke, and then he paused for a moment. "Did it never strike *you* that he was *here* very often?"

"No," said Aunt Sophy, stolidly. "Haven't noticed. I suppose he comes to help Lesley with her singing. Good gracious, Caspar, the girl can take care of herself."

"I dare say she can, but I don't want any trifling—or—  
or flirtation—to go on," said Brooke, rather sharply. "We are responsible for her, you know: we have to hand her over in good condition, mind and body, at the end of the twelve months. And if you can't look after her, I must get her a companion or something. I've been inclined to come up and play sheep-dog myself, sometimes, when I have heard them practising for an hour together just above my head."

"If they disturb you, Caspar," began Miss Brooke, with real solicitude; but her brother did not allow her to finish her sentence.

"No, no, they don't disturb me—in the way you mean. I confess I should feel more comfortable if I thought that somebody was with the two young people, to play propriety, and all that sort of thing."

"I thought you were above such conventionalism," said Miss Brooke, glaring at him through her glasses from her lofty height upon the steps.

"Not at all. Not where my daughter is concerned. Children teach their father very new and unexpected lessons, I find; and I don't look with equanimity on the prospect of Lesley's being made love to by Oliver Trent, or of her going back to her mother and telling her that she was left so much to her own devices. I am sure of one thing—that Lady Alice would not like it."

"And am I to give up all my engagements for the sake of sitting with two silly young people?" said Miss Brooke, the very hair of her head seeming to bristle with horror at the idea.

"By no means. I don't see that you need be always there; but be there sometimes; don't give occasion to the enemy," said Mr. Brooke, turning to go.

"Who is the enemy?" said Doctor Sophy—a spiteful question, as she well knew.

"The world," said Caspar Brooke, quite quietly: he did not choose to see the spitefulness.

"Oh," said Miss Brooke. "I thought you meant your wife." But she did not dare to say this until he was well out of the room, and the door firmly closed behind him.

But Miss Brooke was neither malicious nor unreasonable. On consideration she came to the conclusion that her brother was substantially right—as a matter of fact she always came to that conclusion—and prepared to carry out his views of the matter. Only she carried them out in her own way. She made a point of being present on the occasion of Mr. Trent's next two calls, and although she read a book all the time, she was virtuously conscious of the fact that her mere presence "made all the difference." But on the third occasion she wanted to go out. What was to be done? Miss Brooke's mind was fertile of resource, and she triumphantly surmounted the difficulty.

"Kingston," she said to Lesley's maid, "I am obliged to go out, and I don't like leaving Miss Lesley so much alone. You may take your work down to the library and sit there, and don't go away if visitors come in. You can just draw the curtains, you know."

"Am I to stay all the afternoon, ma'am?" Kingston inquired, with surprise.

"Yes. I'll speak to Miss Lesley about it. I think she ought to have some one at hand when I am out so much."

So Kingston—*alias* Mary Trent—took her needlework, and seated herself by the library window, whence the half-drawn curtains between library and drawing-room afforded her a complete view of all visitors to Miss Lesley.

Oliver Trent was distinctly annoyed by this proceeding, but Lesley, although puzzled, was equally well pleased. It was an arrangement all the more displeasing to Oliver because the waiting-woman who sat so demurely in the library, within earshot of all that he chose to say, was his brother's wife. He felt sure that she had contrived it all; that she was there simply to act as a spy upon his actions. Francis wanted that money, and would not get it until he married Miss Kenyon; and was evidently afraid—from information conveyed to him by Kingston—that he was going to break off his engagement. Oliver flew into a silent rage at the thought of this combination, which he was nevertheless powerless to prevent. He went away early that afternoon, and came again next day. Kingston was there also with her work. And though he sang and played the piano as usual with Lesley, although he chatted and laughed and had tea with her as usual, he felt Kingston's presence a restraint. And for the first time he asked himself, seriously, why this should be.

"Why, of course," he said to himself, "I promised Rosalind to make love to her. And I can't make love to her when that woman's there. Curse her! she spoils my plans."

He had shut himself up in the luxurious little smoking-room which Mrs. Romaine had arranged for him. She knew the value of a room in which a man feels himself at liberty to do what he likes. She never came there without especial invitation: she always said that she preferred seeing her brother in her own drawing-room—that she was not like Miss Brooke, and did *not* smoke cigarettes. But that was one of the little ways in which Rosalind used to emphasize the difference between herself and the women whom she did not love.

At any rate, Oliver was alone. The curtains were drawn, the lamp was lighted, a bright fire burned in the grate. He had drawn up a softly-cushioned lounging chair to the fire, and was peacefully smoking a remarkably good cigar.

But his frame of mind was anything but peaceful. He had been troubled for some days, and he did not know what troubled him. He was now beginning to find out.

"What are my plans, I wonder?" he reflected. "To make Lesley fall in love with me?—I wish I could! She is as cold as ice; as innocent as a child: and yet I think there is a tremendous capacity for passion in those dark eyes of hers, those mobile, sensitive lips! What lips to kiss! what eyes to flash back fire and feeling! what a splendid woman to win and show the world! It would be like loving a goddess—as if Diana herself had stooped from Olympus to grace Endymion!"

And then he laughed aloud.

"What a fool I am! Poetizing like a boy; and all about a girl who never can be my wife at all. That's the worst part of it. I am engaged—engaged! unutterably ridiculous word!—to marry little Ethel Kenyon, the pretty actress at the Novelty. The respectable, wealthy, well-connected actress, moreover—the product of modern civilization: the young woman of our day who aspires to purify the drama and vindicate the claims of histrionic art—what rubbish it all is! If Ethel were a ballet-dancer, or had taken to opera bouffe, she would be much more entertaining! But her enthusiasms, and her belief in herself and her mission, along with that *mignonne*, provoking, pretty, little face of hers, are altogether too incongruous! No, Ethel bores me, it

must be confessed ; and I have got to marry her—all for a paltry twenty thousand pounds ! What a fool I was to propose before I had seen Brooke's daughter.

"If it weren't for Francis, I would break it off. But how else am I to pay that two thousand ? And what won't he do if I fail to pay it ? No, that would be ruin—unless I choke him off in some other way, and I don't see how I can do that. No, I must marry Ethel, I suppose, or go to the devil. And unless I could take bonny Lesley with me, that would not mend matters."

He threw his cigar into the fire, and stood for some minutes looking down at it, with gloom imprinted upon his brow.

"I must do something," he said at last. "It's getting too much for me : I shall have to stop going to Brooke's house. I suppose this is what people call falling in love ! Well, I can honestly say I have never done it in this fashion before ! I have flirted, I have made love scores of times, but I never wanted a woman for my own as I want *her* ! And I think I had better keep out of her way—for her eyes will send me mad !"

So he soliloquized : so he resolved ; but inclination was stronger than will or judgment. Day after day saw him at the Brookes' house ; and day after day saw the shadows deepen on Ethel's face, and the fold of perplexity grow more distinct between Lesley's tender brows.

Kingston had been looking ill and uneasy for some days past, and one afternoon she begged leave to go out for an hour or two to see a friend. Miss Brooke let her go, and went out to a meeting with a perfectly contented mind. Even if Oliver Trent came to the house that afternoon it would not matter : it would be only "once in a way." And Lesley secretly hoped that he would not come.

But he came. A little later than usual—about four o'clock in the afternoon, when there was no light in the drawing-room but that of the ruddy blaze, and the tea-tray had not yet been brought up. When Lesley saw him she wished that she had sent down word that she was engaged, that she had a headache, or even that she was—conventionally—not at home. Anything rather than a tête-à-tête with Oliver Trent ! And yet she would have been puzzled to say why.

His quick eye told him almost at once that she was alone. It told him also that she was decidedly nervous and ill-at-ease.

"We must have lights," she said. "Then you can see my new song. I had a fresh one this morning."

"Never mind the lights: never mind your song," he said, his voice vibrating strangely. "If you are like me, you love this delightful twilight."

"I don't like it," said Lesley, with decision. "I will ring for the lamps, please."

She moved a step, but by a dexterous movement he interposed himself between her and the mantelpiece, beside which hung the bell-handle.

"Shall I ring?" he asked, coolly. It seemed to him that he wanted to gain time. And yet—time for what? He had nothing to get by gaining time.

"Yes, if you please," Lesley said. She could not get past him without seeming rude. A slight tremor shook her frame; she shrank away from him, towards the open piano and leaned against it as if for support. The flickering fire-light showed her that his face was very pale, the lips were tightly closed, the brows knitted above his fiercely flaming eye. He did not look like himself.

"Lesley," he said, hoarsely, and stretching forward, he put one hand upon her arm. But the touch gave the girl strength. She drew her arm away, as sharply as if a noxious animal had touched her.

"Mr. Trent, you forget yourself."

"Rather say that I remember myself—that I found myself when I found you! Lesley, I love you!"

"This is shameful—intolerable! You are pledged to my friend—you have said all this to her before," cried Lesley, in bitter wrath and indignation.

"I have said it, but I never knew the meaning of love till I knew you. Lesley, you love me in return! Let us leave the world together—you and I. Nothing can give me the happiness that your love would bring. Lesley, Lesley, my darling!"

He threw his arm round her, and tried to kiss her cold cheek, her averted, half-open lips. She would have pushed him from her if she had had the strength; but it seemed as if her strength was failing her. Suddenly, with a half-smothered oath, he let her go—so suddenly, indeed, that

she almost fell against the piano near which she had been standing. For the door had opened, and the tall figure of Caspar Brooke stood on the threshold of the room.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## MAURICE KENYON'S VIEWS.

MR. BROOKE advanced quite quietly into the room. Perhaps he had not seen or heard so very much. Certainly he glanced very keenly—first at Lesley, who leaned half-fainting against the piano, and then at Oliver Trent, who had slunk backwards to the rug before the fire; but he said nothing, and for a minute or two an embarrassed silence prevailed in the room. Lesley then raised herself up a little, and Oliver began to speak.

"I was just going," he said, with a nervous attempt at a laugh. "I haven't much time to-night, and was just hurrying away. I must come in another time."

Mr. Brooke took up a commanding position on the rug, put his hands in his pockets, and surveyed the room in silence. Perhaps Oliver felt the silence to be ominous, for he did not try to shake hands or to utter any common-places, but took his leave with a hurried "Good-afternoon" that neither father nor daughter returned. The door shut behind him: they heard the sound of his footsteps on the stairs and the closing of the hall door. Then Lesley bestirred herself with the sensation of a wounded animal that wishes to hide its hurt: she wanted to get away and seek the darkness and solitude of her room upstairs. But before she reached the door Mr. Brooke's voice arrested her.

"Lesley."

She stopped short, and looked at him. Her heart beat so suffocatingly loud and fast that she could not speak.

"I don't trust that young man, Lesley," was what her father said quite quietly.

Then there was a pause. Lesley was still tongue-tied, and Mr. Brooke did not seem to know what to do or say. He walked away from the fire and began to finger some papers on a table, although it was quite too dark to see any of these. Inwardly he was wondering how much or how little he ought to say.



"I wish he would not come quite so often," he remarked.

"Oh, so do I!" said Lesley, with heartfelt warmth.

"Do you? Why, child, I thought you liked him!"

"I never liked him much," said Lesley, faltering.

"And yet you have allowed him to come here day after day and practise with you? The ways of women are inscrutable," said Mr. Brooke, grimly, "and I can't profess to understand them. If you did not wish him to come, there was nothing to do but to close your doors against him."

"I shall be only too glad," said Lesley, eagerly.

"Oh—*now*? That is unnecessary: I shall do it myself," said her father, with the same dryness of tone that always made Lesley feel as if she were withering up to nothingness.

"I don't think he is very likely to come," she said, in a very low tone. Then, with a quick impulse to clear herself, and an effort which brought the blood in a burning tide to her fair face, she went on, hurriedly—"Father, you don't think I forgot that he"—and then she almost broke down, and "Ethel" was the only word that struck distinctly upon his ear.

"You mean," said Mr. Brooke, "that you do not forget that he is going to marry Ethel Kenyon? Perhaps not; but I think that *he* does."

"I am not to blame for that," said Lesley, with a flash of the hot temper that occasionally leaped to light when she was talking with her father.

Brooke made no immediate answer. He took a match box from his pocket, struck a match, and began to light the wax candles on the mantelpiece—partly by way of finding something to do, partly because he thought that he should like to see his daughter's face.

It was a very downcast face just then, but it was tinged with the hot flush of mingled pride and shame with which she had spoken, and never had it looked more lovely. The father considered it for a moment, less with admiration than with curiosity: this daughter of his was an unknown quantity: he never could predicate what she would do or say. Certainly she surprised him once more when she lifted her head, and said, quickly—

"I don't think I understand your English ways. I know what we should do at the convent; but I never know whe-

ther I am right or wrong here. And I have no one to ask."

"There is your Aunt Sophy."

"It is almost impossible to ask Aunt Sophy; she never sees where the difficulty lies. I know she is kind—but she does not understand what I want."

Caspar nodded. "That is one reason why I spoke to you just now," he said, much more gently than usual. "I knew that she was a little brusque sometimes; and I suppose I am not much better. As a rule a father does not talk to his girls as I have been talking to you, I fancy. I am almost as ignorant of a father's duties to his daughter as you say you are of the habits of English bourgeois society—for I suppose that is what you mean?"

He smiled a little—the slight smile of a satire which Lesley always dreaded; and yet, she remembered, his voice had been very kind. It softened again into its gentlest and most musical tones, as he said—

"You must take us as you find us, child: we shall not do you much harm, and it will not be for long."

Lesley was emboldened by the gentle intonation to draw closer to him, and to lay an entreating hand upon his arm.

"Oh, father," she said, "if you would but let me write to mamma!"

And then she uttered a little sob, and the tears filled her eyes and ran down her cheeks. As for Caspar Brooke, he stood like a man amazed, and repeated her words almost stupidly.

"*Write to mamma?*" he said.

"It would do me good: it would not do any harm," said Lesley, hurriedly, brokenly, and clasping his arm with both hands to enforce her plea. "I would not tell her anything that you did not like: I should never say anything but good about you; but, oh, there are so many things that puzzle me, and that I should like to consult her about. You see, although I was not much with her, I used to write to her twice a week, and she wrote to me oftener, sometimes; and I told her everything, and she used to advise me and help me! And I miss it so much—it is that that makes me unhappy; it seems so hard never to write and never to hear from her! I feel sometimes as if I could not bear it; as if I should have to run away to her again and tell her everything! Nobody is like her—nobody—and to be a year without her is terrible!"

And Lesley put her head down on her father's arm and cried unrestrainedly, with a sort of newborn instinct that he sympathized with her, and would not repulse her confidence.

As for Caspar Brooke, his face had turned quite pale : he stood like a statue, with features rigidly set, listening to Lesley's outburst of pleading words. It took him a little time to find his voice, even when he had at last assimilated the ideas contained in her speech and regained his self-possession. It took him still longer to recover from a certain shock of surprise.

"Write to your mother !" he exclaimed. "Well, but, of course—why should you not write to your mother ?"

And then Lesley raised her head and looked at him with such amazement and perplexity that her father felt absolutely annoyed.

"Who on earth put it into your head that you might not write ? Am I such a tyrant—such an unfeeling monster—? Good heavens ! what extraordinary idea is this ! Who said that you were not to write to her ?"

"My mother herself," said Lesley, drawing herself a little away from him, and still looking into his face.

"Your *mother* ? Absurd ! Why, what—what——"

He faltered, frowned, turned away to the mantelpiece, and struck his hand heavily upon it.

"I never meant *that*," he said. It seemed as if vexation and astonishment prevented him from saying more.

"My mother said that it was agreed—years ago—that when I came to you, we were to have no communication," said Lesley, trembling, and yet resolute to have her say. "Was not that so ?"

"I remember something of the sort," he answered, reluctantly, frowning still and looking down. "I did not think at the time of what it implied. And when the time drew near for you to make the visit, the question was not raised. We corresponded through a third party—the lawyer, you know. Perhaps—at the time—I had an idea of preventing letters, but not recently. Nobody mentioned it—Why"—his anger rising, as a man's anger often does rise when he perceives himself to have been in the wrong—"your mother might at least have mentioned it if she felt any doubt !"

"I suppose," said Lesley, rather haughtily, "that my mother did not want to ask a favor of you."

He flung himself round at that. "Your mother must have given you a strange idea of me!" he said, with a mixture of anger and mortification which it humiliated him to show, even while he could not manage to hide it. "One would have said I was an ogre—a maniac. But she misjudged me all her life—it is useless to expect anything else—of course she would try to bias you!"

"I never knew that you were even alive until the day that I left the convent," said Lesley. "My mother certainly did not try to prejudice me before then: she simply kept silence."

"Silence is the worst condemnation? What had I done that I should be separated from my child so completely?" said the man, the bitterness of years displaying itself in a way as unexpected to him as to his daughter. "It is not my fault, I swear, that I have lived without a wife, without—well, well! it is not you to whom I ought to say this. We will not refer to it again. About this letter writing—I might say, as perhaps I did say at the time the arrangement was made, that surely I had a right to claim you entirely for one year at least; but I don't—I won't. If I did ever say so, Lesley, I regret the words exceedingly. Ever since you came to me, I have had no idea but that you were writing to her regularly and freely; and I never—never in my right mind—wished it otherwise."

"But mamma talked of an agreement——"

"That was years ago. I must have said something in my heat which the lawyers—the people who arranged things—interpreted wrongly. And your mother, as you say, did not care to ask me for anything. I can only say, Lesley, that I am sorry the mistake arose."

His voice was grave and cold again, almost indifferent. He stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece, his hand supporting his head, his eyes averted from the girl. A close eye might have observed that the veins of his forehead were swollen, and the pulse at his temple was beating furiously: otherwise he had mastered all signs of agitation. Lesley hesitated a moment: then came up to him, and put her slim fingers into his hand.

"Father," she said, softly, "if we *have* misjudged you—mamma and I—won't you forgive us?"

For answer he took her face between his two hands, bent down and kissed it tenderly.

"You don't remember sitting on my knee when you were a tiny little thing, do you?" he asked her. "You would not go to sleep at nights without a kiss from me before I went out. You were rather fond of me then, child! I wish things had turned out differently!"

He spoke sadly, and Lesley returned his kiss with a new feeling of affection of which she had not been conscious before, but which she would have found it difficult to translate into words. Before she could manage to reply, the handle of the door was turned, and father and daughter stood apart as quickly as if they had had no right to stand with arms enlaced and faces almost touching: indeed, the situation was so new to both of them that they felt something like shame and alarm as they turned to meet the expected Doctor Sophy.

But it was not Doctor Sophy. It was Sarah with the tea-tray, very resentful at not having had it rung for earlier—she having been instructed not to bring it up until Miss Lesley rang the bell. And after Sarah came Mr. Maurice Kenyon, unannounced, after his usual fashion. And on hearing his voice, Lesley slipped away between the curtains into the library, and upstairs, through the library door.

"Why, Brooke, old fellow, you're not often to be found here at this hour!" began Maurice. He looked on Caspar Brooke as a prophet and a hero in his heart; but his manner before the world was characterized by the frankest irreverence. Brooke was one of those men who are never older than their companions.

"Well, you must be neglecting your patients shamefully to be here at all. What do you want at this feminine meal?"

"I didn't come for tea," said Maurice, actually growing a little redder as he spoke. "I came to see Miss Brooke."

"Oh, she's gone to a meeting of some Medical Association or other," said Caspar, indifferently, as he sat down in Lesley's place at the dainty tea-table, and poured out a cup of tea with the manner of a man who was accustomed to serving himself. "Here, help yourself to sugar and cream."

"Thanks, I won't have any tea. I did not mean your sister: I meant Miss Lesley—I thought I saw her as I came in."

"Anything important?" said Caspar, blandly. He was certain that Lesley had gone away to cry—women

always cry!—and he did not want her to be disturbed. Although he had quarrelled with his wife, he understood feminine susceptibilities better than most men.

"Oh, no. Only to ask her to sing at the Club on Sunday. It's my turn to manage the music for that day, you know. Trent is going to sing too."

"Ah," said Mr. Brooke. Then, after a pause: "I will ask her. But I don't think she will be able to sing on Sunday. It strikes me she has an engagement."

He could not say to Ethel's brother what was in his mind, and yet he was troubled by the intensity of his conviction that she was throwing herself away upon "a cad." He must take some other method in the future of giving Maurice a hint about young Trent.

Maurice thought, not untruly, that there was something odd in his tone.

"Isn't she well?" he asked, with his usual straightforwardness. "I hope there is nothing wrong."

"I did not say there was anything wrong, did I?" demanded Caspar. Then, squaring his shoulders, and sitting well back in his chair, with his hands plunged into the pockets of his old study coat, and his eyes fixed on his visitor's face, he thus acquitted himself—"Maurice, my young friend, I am and have been a most confounded ass."

"Oh?" said Maurice, interrogatively.

"I think it would relieve me—if I weren't out of practice—to swear. But I've preached against 'langwidge' so long at the club that I don't think I could get up the necessary stock of expletives."

"I'll supply you. I shouldn't have thought that there was a lack of them down in your printing offices about one or two o'clock every morning, from what I've heard. What is it, if I may ask? Anything wrong with the Football Club?"

"Football Club! My dear fellow, I have a private life, unfortunately, as contradistinguished from your everlasting clubs and printing offices."

"It is something about Miss Brooke, is it?" said Maurice, with greater interest. "I was afraid there was something——"

"Why?"

"Oh—well, you must excuse me for mentioning it—but wasn't she—wasn't she crying as she went out of the room?"

And she has not been looking well for the last month or so."

"I suppose you mean that she is not particularly happy here, with her father?"

Maurice elevated his eyebrows. "Brooke, old man, what have you got into your head?" he asked, kindly. "You look put out a good bit. Does she say she wants to leave you?"

"Oh, no, no, 'tisn't that. I daresay she does, though. You know the whole story—it is no good disguising the details from you. There's been a wretched little mistake—all my fault, no doubt, but not intentionally so: the girl came here with the idea that she might not write to her mother—some nonsense about 'no communication' between them stood in the way; and it seems she has been pining to do so ever since she came."

"And she never asked you? never complained, or said anything?"

"She broke down over it to-day. I'm ashamed to look her in the face," said Brooke, vehemently. "I'm ashamed to think of what they—their opinion of me is. A domineering, flinty-hearted, unnatural parent, eh, Maurice? Ogre and tyrant and all the rest of it. As if I ever meant to put a stop to her writing to her mother! I never heard of such an unjustifiable proceeding! I never thought of such an absurd idea!"

"Then weren't you very much to blame to allow the mistake to arise?" asked Maurice, bluntly.

"Of course I was. That's the abominable and confounded part of it. Some hasty words of mine were misinterpreted, of course. I told you I had been an ass."

"Well, I hope it is set straight now?"

"As far as I can set it straight. Probably nothing will undo the effect. She'll think that I was cruel in the first instance if not in the last."

He sat staring at his boots, with a very discontented expression of countenance. But he did not get much sympathy from Mr. Kenyon.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you've yourself to blame. I've no doubt you have been very hasty, lots of times. It's my own idea that if you went into detail over a good many actions of your past life"—this was very significantly said—"you would find that you had been mistaken pretty

often. We all do. And there's one mistake that I think I can point out to you."

Caspar looked at him hard for a moment from under his bushy eyebrows.

"One subject, Kenyon," he said, seriously, "I shall ask you to respect."

"All right," said Maurice. "I am only speaking of your daughter. You must allow me to say that I think you have misjudged her, ever since she has been in your house for the last three months. I did just the same, at first. You see, she came here, as far as I can make out, puzzled, ignorant of the world, deprived of her mother's help and care, thrown on the tender mercies of a father whom she did not know——"

"And whom she took to be an ogre," said Brooke, with a bitter, little laugh.

"Brought into a world that she knew nothing about, and amongst a set of people who could not understand why she looked sad and lonely, poor child!——"

"I say, Maurice, you are speaking of my daughter, remember."

"Don't be touchy, old man. I speak and I think of her with every respect. We have all misjudged and misunderstood her: she is a young girl, little more than a child, and a child astray, pining uncomplainingly for her mother, doing her best to understand the new world she was thrown into, devouring your writings and trying as hard as she could to assimilate every good and noble idea that she came across—I say that she's a saint and a heroine," said Maurice, with sudden passion and enthusiasm, "and we've forgotten that not a girl in a thousand could have come through a trying ordeal so well!"

"She hasn't come out of her ordeal at all, Maurice: the ordeal of living in the house of a brutal father, who, in her view, probably broke her mother's heart: all that has to be proceeded with for nine months longer!"

"It need not be an ordeal if she knows that you love her: if she writes to her mother and gets the sympathy and aid she needs. Upon my soul, Brooke, it seems to me that you are hard upon your daughter!"

"Do you think I need to be taught my duty by you, young man?" said Caspar. He spoke with a smile, but his tone was undoubtedly sharp. His disciple was not so submissive as he had hitherto appeared to be.



"Yes, I do," said Maurice, undismayed. "Because I appreciate her and understand her, which you don't. I was dense at first as you are, but I have learnt better now—through loving her."

"Through *what*, man?"

"Through loving her. It's the truth, Brooke, as I stand here. I've known it for some little time. It is only because it may seem too sudden to her and to you that I haven't spoken before, and I did not mean to do so when I came here this afternoon. But the fact remains, I love Lesley, and I want her to be my wife."

"Heavens and earth!" said Caspar. "Is the man gone mad!"

## CHAPTER XX.

## LESLEY'S LETTER.

"Not a bit of it," said Maurice sturdily. "I speak the words of truth and soberness. I've thought about it for some time."

"A week?"

"I'm in earnest, Brooke. Do you consent?"

"My good man," said Caspar, slowly, "you forget that I am probably the last person in the world whose consent is of any value."

"Pooh!"

"You may say 'pooh' as much as you like, but the fact remains. When Lesley leaves me, say next August or September, she goes to her mother and her grandfather, who's an earl, more's the pity. They have the guardianship, you understand."

"But you have it legally still."

"Hum—no: we had a formal separation. I named the terms, certainly: I was angry at the time, and was inclined to say that if I might not bring up the child in my own way, neither should its mother. That was why we compromised by sending her to school—but it was to be a school of Lady Alice's choice. The year with me afterwards was a suggestion of mine, of course. But I can't alter what was agreed on then."

"Naturally. But——"

"And as to money affairs," said Caspar, ruthlessly cutting him short, "I have been put all along into the most painful and ridiculous position that a man can well be in. I offered to settle a certain income on my wife and daughter: Lady Alice and her father refused to accept any money from me. I have paid various sums into his bank for Lesley, but I have reason to believe that they have never touched a farthing of it. You see they've put me at a disadvantage all round. And what is to be done when she marries, unless she marries with their consent, I don't

quite see. She won't like to offend them or seem ungrateful when they have done so much for her ; and I—according to the account that they will give her—I have done nothing. So I don't suppose I shall be consulted about her marriage."

"You are her father : you must be consulted."

"Well, as a matter of form ! But I expect that she is destined to marry a duke, my dear fellow ; and I call it sheer folly on your part to have fallen in love with her."

"But you don't object, Brooke ?"

"I only hope that the destined duke will be half as decent a chap as you are. But I can't encourage you—Lesley will have to look out for squalls if she engages herself to you."

"May I not speak to her then ?" inquired Maurice ruefully. "Not at once, perhaps, you know ; but if I think that I have a chance ?"

"Say what you like," said Brooke, with a genial smile ; for his ill-humor had vanished in spite of his apparent opposition to Maurice's suit. "I should like nothing better—for my own part ; but we are both bound to consider Lesley. You know you are a shocking bad match for her. Oh, I know you are the descendant of kings and all that sort of bosh, but as a matter of fact you are only a young medico, a general practitioner, and his lordship is bound to think that I am making something for myself out of the marriage."

"You don't think he'll consent ?"

"Never, my dear boy. One *mésalliance* was enough for him. He has got rid of me, and regained his daughter ; but no doubt he intends to repair her mistake by a grand match for Lesley."

"But perhaps she would not marry the man he chose for her ?"

Brooke laughed. "Can't answer for Lesley, I don't know her well enough," he said. "Have you any notion, now, that she cares for you ?"

Maurice shook his head dismally. "Not in the least. I scarcely think she even likes me. But I mean to try my chance some day."

"I wish you joy," said Lesley's father, with a slight enigmatical smile. "Especially with the Earl of Courtle-roy. Hallo ! there's the dinner bell. We have wasted all our time talking up here : you'll stay and dine?"

"No, thanks—wish I could, but I must dine with Ethel, and go out directly afterwards."

"When is the marriage to take place?" said Caspar, directing a keen glance to the face of his friend.

"Ethel's? There is nothing settled."

"I say, Maurice, I don't like Trent. He's a slippery customer. I would look after him a bit if I were you, and put Ethel on her guard. I think I am bound to say as much as that."

"Do you think any harm of him?"

"I *think* harm of him—unjustly, perhaps. I am not so sure that I know of any. I only want you to keep your eyes open. Good-bye, old man."

And Caspar Brooke gave his friend's hand such a pressure that Maurice went away satisfied that Lesley's father, at any rate, and in spite of protest, was upon his side.

Miss Brooke came into dinner at the last moment, so Mr. Brooke and his daughter were saved the embarrassment of dining alone—for it could not be denied that it would have been embarrassing after the recent scene, if there had been no third person present to whom they could address remarks. Miss Brooke's mind was full of the meeting which she had attended, and she gave them a glowing account of it. Lesley spoke very little, but her face was happier than it had been for a long time, although her eyes were red. Mr. Brooke looked at her a good deal in a furtive kind of way, and with more interest than usual. She was certainly a good-looking girl. But that was not all. Caspar Brooke had passed the period of caring for good looks and nothing else. Lesley had spirit, intelligence, honesty, endurance, as well as beauty. Well, she might make a good wife for Maurice after all. For although he had declared that Kenyon was "a shocking bad match," he was inclined to think in his own heart that Kenyon was too good for his daughter Lesley.

However, he had a soft corner in his big heart for the little girl who used to sit on his knee and refuse to go to sleep without his good-night kiss, and he was pleased when she came up to him before he went out that evening, and timidly put her face up to be kissed, as if she had still been the child he loved. She had never done that before; and he took it more as a sign of gratitude for permission to write to Lady Alice than actual affection for himself.

"Are you writing your letter?" he said, touching her cheek half playfully, half caressingly.

"Yes," said Lesley, looking down. "Is there—have you—no message?"

"Why should I have a message? Your mother and I correspond through our lawyer, my dear. But—well, yes, if you like to say that I am sorry for this mistake of the last few months, you may do so. I have no doubt that she has missed your letters, and I should like her to understand that the correspondence was not discontinued at my desire. I regret the mistake."

He said it formally and gravely, and in a particularly icy tone of voice; but Lesley was for the moment satisfied. She went back to her writing-desk and took up her pen. She had already written a couple of sheets, but in them her father's name had scarcely been mentioned. Now, however, she wrote:—

"You may be wondering, dearest mamma, why I am writing to you in this way, because you told me that I must not write, and I have put off my explanation until almost the end. I could not bear to be without your letters any longer, and to-day I said so to my father. I could not help telling him, because I was so miserable. And he wishes me to tell you that it was all a mistake, and he is very sorry; he never meant to put a stop to our writing to each other, and he is very, *very* sorry that we thought so." Lesley's version was not so dignified as her father had intended it to be. "He was terribly distressed when he found out that I was not writing to you; and called himself all sorts of names—a tyrant and an ogre, and asked what we must have thought of him! He was really very much grieved about it, and never meant us to leave off writing. So now I shall write as often as I please, and you, dearest mamma, will write to me too."

"There is one thing I must say, darling mother, and you will not be angry with me for saying it, will you? I think father must be different now from what he was in the old days; or else—perhaps there *may* have been a mistake about him, such as there has been about the letters! For he is so clever and gentle and kind—a little sarcastic now and then, but always good! The poor people at the Club (which I told you about in the last sheet) just adore him; and they say that he has saved many of them from worse

than death. And you never told me about his book, dear mamma—'The Unexplored.' It is such a beautiful book—surely you think so, although you think ill of the writer? Of course you have read it? I have read it four times, I think; and I want to ask him about some parts of it, but I have never dared—I don't think he even knows that I have read it. It has gone through more than twelve editions, and has been translated into French and German, so you *must* have seen it. And Mr. Kenyon says it sells by thousands in America.

"It was Mr. Kenyon who first told me about it, and made me understand how blind I was at first to my father's really *great* qualities. I know he is not like grandpapa—he does sometimes seem a little rough when compared to grandpapa; but then you always said I must not expect every man I met in the world to have grandpapa's courtly manners. And it must have been very lonely for you if he went out at such funny hours as he does now, and did not breakfast or lunch with you! But I am told that all 'journalists keep these hours,' and that it is very provincial of me not to know it! It is a very different house, and different life, from any that I ever saw before; but I am getting accustomed to it now, especially since Mr. Kenyon has talked to me.

"Dearest mother, don't think that I love you one whit the less because I am away from you, and am learning to love other people a little too. Nobody could be to me what you are, my own dear mother.—Your child,

"LESLEY."

So Lesley's girlish, emotional, indiscreet letter went upon its way to Lady Alice, who was just then in Eaton Square, and Lesley never dreamt of the tears that it brought to her mother's eyes.

The letter was a shock to Lady Alice in more ways than one. First, it showed her that on one point at least she *had* been mistaken—and it was a point that had long been a very sore one to her. Caspar had not meant the correspondence between mother and daughter to cease—so he said now; but she was certain that he had spoken very harshly about it when the arrangement was first made. He had even affected to doubt whether she had heart enough to care whether she heard from her child or not.

Well, possibly he had altered his views since those days. Lesley said that he *must* be different! Poor Lesley! thought Lady Alice, how very little she knew! She seemed to have been as much fascinated by her father as Lady Alice had been, in days long past, by Caspar Brooke as a lover; but Lady Alice reflected that *she* had never thought of Caspar as good or gentle or "great" in any way. She thought of him chiefly in his relation to herself, and in that relation he had not been satisfactory. Yes, she remembered well enough the sarcastic remarks, the odd hours, the discomfort of her solitary meals. Lesley could see all these points, and yet discover good in the man, and not be disgusted? Lady Alice could not understand her daughter's impartiality.

Of course—it had occurred to her once or twice—that, being human, she *might* have been mistaken. She could have got over the dreariness and discomfort of Caspar's home, if Caspar had but loved her. Suppose—it was just a remote possibility—Caspar had loved her all the time!

"The child has infected me with her romantic ideas," said Lady Alice, at last, with a faint, sad smile. "Let me see—what does she say about her friends? The Kenyons—Ethel Kenyon—Mr. Trent—the clergyman of the parish—Mr. Kenyon—Mr. Kenyon I wonder who the Mr. Kenyon is of whom she speaks so highly. Surely not a clergyman too? Poor Caspar disliked clergymen so much. I wonder if Mrs. Romaine is still living in the neighborhood. But no, I remember: she went out to Calcutta and then to some German baths with her husband. What became of her, I wonder! If she were friendly with Caspar still, Leslie would be sure to mention her to me!"

And she read the letter through once more. But Lesley had not said a word about Mrs. Romaine: her heart had been too hot and angry with the remembrance of what Mrs. Romaine's brother had done, to lead her to say one word about the family.

Lady Alice lingered curiously over Lesley's remarks on "The Unexplored." She had not read the book herself. She had seen it and heard of it very often—so often that she thought she knew all that it contained. But for Lesley's sake she resolved to read it now. Perhaps it held strange, dangerous doctrines, against which her daughter ought to be cautioned. Of course the house did not contain a copy.

But early in the day Lady Alice went to the nearest book-seller's and bought a copy. The obliging book-seller, who did not know her, remarked that "Brooke's 'Unexplored'" was always popular, and asked her whether she would like an unbound copy, or one bound in neat great cloth. Lady Alice took the latter: she had a distaste for paper-covered books.

She read "The Unexplored" in her own room that morning, but of course she was not struck by it exactly as Lesley had been. The facts which had horrified Lesley were no novelties to her. She was, in truth, slightly angry that her innocent Lesley should have so much of the great city's misery and shame laid bare to her. She acknowledged the truth of the portraiture, the beauty of the descriptions, the eloquence of the author's appeals to the higher classes; but she acknowledged it with resentment. Why had Caspar written a book of this sort? a book that taunted the higher classes with their birth, and reproached the wealthy with their riches? It was rather a disgrace than otherwise, in Lady Alice's aristocratic eyes, to be connected in any way with the writer of "The Unexplored."

Nevertheless, the book stirred in her the desire to vindicate the worth of her order and of her sex; and the next day, after having despatched a long and tender letter to Lesley (with a formal message of thanks to her husband), she went out to call on a lady, who was noted in her circle as a great philanthropist, and mentioned to her in a timid way that she wished she could be of any use amongst the poor, but she really did not see what she could do.

Her friend, Mrs. Bexley, was nothing if not practical.

"But, my dearest Lady Alice, you can be of every use in the world," she said. "I am going to drive to the East End to-morrow morning, to distribute presents at the London Hospital—it is getting so close to Christmas, you know, that we really must not put it off any longer. I generally go once a week to visit the children and some of the other patients. Won't you come with me?"

"I am afraid I should be of very little use," said Lady Alice.

"But we shall not want you to do anything—only to say a kind word to the patients now and then, and give them things."

"I think I could do that," said Lesley's mother, softly.



She went back to her father's house quite cheered by the unexpected prospect of something to do—something which should take her out of the routine of ordinary work—something which should bring her closer (though she did not say it to herself) to the aims and objects of Lesley and Caspar Brooke.

The visit was a great success. Lady Alice, with her tall, graceful figure, her winning face, her becoming dress, was a pleasant sight for the weary eyes of the women and children in the accident wards. Mrs. Bexley was wise enough not to take her near any very painful sights. Lady Alice talked to some of the little children and gave them toys: she made friends, rather shyly, with some of the women, and promised to come and see them again. Mrs. Bexley was well known in the hospital, and was allowed to stay an unusually long time. So it happened that one of the doctors, coming rather hurriedly into one of the wards, paused at the sight of a lady bending over one of the children's beds, and looked so surprised that one of the nurses hastened to explain that the stranger came with old Mrs. Bexley and was going away again directly.

The doctor nodded, and went straight up to the child's bed. Lady Alice, raising herself after careful arrangement of some wooden animals on the sick child's table, came face to face with a very handsome man of about thirty, who seemed to be regarding her with especial interest. He moved away with a slight bow when she looked back at him, but he did not go far. He paused to chat with another little patient, and Lady Alice noticed that all the small faces brightened at the sight of him, and that two or three children called him imperiously to their bedsides. Something about him vaguely interested her—perhaps it was only his pleasant look, perhaps the affection with which he was regarded, perhaps the expression which his face had worn when he looked at her. She remembered him so well that she was able when she paid a second visit to the hospital to describe him to one of the Sisters, and ask his name.

"Kenyon," she repeated, when it was told to her. "I suppose it is not an uncommon name?"

Lesley had spoken of a Mr. Kenyon. It was not this Mr. Kenyon, of course!

But it *was* "this Mr. Kenyon;" and thus Maurice met the mother of the girl he loved in the ward of a London

hospital, whither Lady Alice had been urged by that impulse towards "The Unexplored," of which her husband was the author. And in another ward of the same hospital lay a patient whose destiny was to influence the fates of both—an insensible man, whose name was unknown to the nurses, but whom Oliver would have recognized as his brother. Francis Trent.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## ETHEL REMONSTRATES.

THE house in which the Kenyons resided was built on the same pattern as Mr. Brooke's, but it was in some respects very unlike Mr. Brooke's place of residence. Maurice's consulting-room and dining-room corresponded, perhaps, to Mr. Brooke's dining-room and study : it was upstairs where the difference showed itself. Ethel's drawing-room was like herself—a little whimsical, a little bizarre ; pretty, withal, and original, and somewhat unlike anything one had ever seen before. She was fond of novelties, and introduced the latest fashions in draperies or china or screens as soon as she could get hold of them ; and the result was occasionally incongruous, though always bright and cheerful-looking.

It was the incongruity of the ornaments and arrangements which chiefly struck the mind of Oliver Trent as he entered Ethel's drawing-room one afternoon, and stumbled over a footstool placed where no footstool ought to be.

"I wish," he began, somewhat irritably, as he touched Ethel's forehead with his lips, "that you would not make your room quite so much like a fancy fair, Ethel."

Ethel raised her eyebrows. "Why, Oliver, only the other day you said how pretty it was !"

"Pretty ! I hate the word. As 'if prettiness' could be taken as a test of what was best in art."

"My room isn't 'art,' pouted Ethel ; "it's *me*."

The sentence might be ungrammatical, but it was strictly true. The room represented Ethel's character exactly. It was odd, quaint, striking, and attractive. But Oliver was not in the mood to see its attractiveness.

"It is certainly a medley," he replied, with some incisiveness. "How many styles do you think are represented in the place ? Japanese, Egyptian, Renaissance, Louis Quinze, Queen Anne, Early Georgian——"

"Oh, no ! please don't go on !" cried Ethel, with mock earnestness. "*Not* Early Georgian, please ! Anything but that !"

"It is all incongruous and out of taste," said Oliver, in an ill-tempered tone, and then he threw himself into a deep, comfortable lounging chair, and closed his eyes as if the sight of the room were too much for his nerves.

Ethel remained standing: her pretty *mignonne* figure was motionless; her bright face was thoughtful and overcast.

"Do you mean," she said, quietly, "that I am incongruous and out of taste too!"

There was a new note in her voice. Usually it was light and bird-like: now there was something a little more weighty, a little more serious, than had been heard in it before. Oliver noted the change, and moved his head restlessly; he did not want to quarrel with Ethel, but he was ill at ease in her presence, and therefore apt to be exceedingly irritable with her.

"You wrest my words, of course," he answered. "You always do. There's no arguing with—with—a woman."

"With *me* you were about to say. Don't spare *me*. What other accusations have you to bring!"

"Accusations! Nonsense!"

"It is not nonsense, Oliver." Her voice trembled. "I have felt for some time that all was not right between us. I can't shut my eyes. I must believe what I see, and what I feel. We must understand one another."

Oliver's eyes were wide open now. He began to see that he had gone a little too far. It would not do to snub Ethel too much—at least before the marriage. Afterwards—he said to himself—he should treat her as he felt inclined. But now——

"You are mistaken, Ethel," he said, in a tone of half appeased vexation which he thought very effective. "What on earth should there be wrong between us! Open your eyes and your ears as much as you like, my dear child, but don't be misled by what you feel." The wind is in the East, remember. You feel a chill, most probably, and you put your *malaise* down to me."

His tone grew more affectionate as he spoke. He wanted her to believe that he had been suffering from a mere passing cloud of ill-temper, and that he was already ashamed of it.

"I feel the effects of the weather myself," he said. "I have been horribly depressed all day, and I have a head-

ache. Perhaps that is why the brightness of your room seemed to hurt my eyes. You know that I always like it when I am well."

He looked at her keenly, hoping that this reference to possible ill-health might bring the girl to his feet, as it had often done before in the case of other women; but it did not seem to produce the least effect. She stood silent, immobile, with her eyes still fixed upon the floor. Silence and stillness were so unusual in one of Ethel's vivacious temperament, that Oliver began to feel alarmed.

"Ethel," he said, advancing to her, and laying his hand upon hers, "what is wrong? What have I done?"

She shook her head hastily, but made no other reply.

"Look at me," he said, softly.

And then she lifted her eyes. But they wore a questioning and not a trustful look.

"Ethel, dearest, what have I done to offend you? It cannot be my silly comment on your room that makes you look so grave? Believe me, dear, it came only from my headache and my bad temper. I am deeply sorry to have hurt you. Only speak—scold me if you like—but do not keep me in this suspense."

He was skilled in the art of pleading. His pale face, usually so expressionless, took on the look of almost passionate entreaty.

Ethel was an actress by profession—perhaps a little by nature also—but she was too essentially simple-hearted to suspect her friends of acting parts in private life, and indeed trusted them rather more implicitly than most people trust their friends. It had been a grief to her to doubt Oliver's faith for a moment, and her eyes filled with tears, while they flashed also with indignation, as she replied,

"You must know what I mean. I have felt it for a very long time. You do not care for me as you used to do."

"Upon my soul, I do!" cried Oliver, very sincerely.

"Then you never cared for me very much."

This was getting serious. Oliver had no mind to break off his engagement. He reserved the right to snub Ethel without giving offence. If this was an impracticable course to pursue, it was evident that he must abandon it and eat humble pie. Anything rather than part from her just now. He had lost the woman he loved; it would not do to lose also his only chance of winning a competency for himself and immunity from fear of want in the future.

"Ethel," he said, softly, "you grieve me very much. I acknowledge my faults of temper—I did not think you mistook then for a want of love."

"I do not think I do. It is something more real, more tangible than that."

"What is it, dear?"

She paused, then looked keenly into his face. "It seems to me, Oliver, that Lesley Brooke has won your heart away from me."

He threw back his head and laughed—a singularly jarring and unpleasant laugh, as it seemed to her. "What will you imagine next?" he said.

"Imagine? Have I imagined it? Isn't it true that you have been at her house almost every day for the last three or four weeks? Do you come here as often? Is it not Lesley that attracts you?—not me!"

"Oh, so you are jealous!"

"Yes, I suppose I am. It is only natural, I think."

They faced each other for a moment, defiantly, almost fiercely. There was a proud light in Ethel's eyes, a compression of the lips which told that she was not to be trifled with. Oliver stood pale, with frowning brows, and eyes that seemed to question both the reality of her feeling and the answer that he should make to her demand. It was by a great effort of self-control that at last he answered her with calmness—

"I assure you, Ethel, you are utterly mistaken. What have I in common with a girl like Miss Brooke—one of the most curiously ignorant and wrong-headed persons I ever came across? Can you think for a moment that I should compare her with you?—*you*, beautiful and gifted and cultured above most women?"

"That is nothing to the point," said Ethel, quickly. "Men don't love women because of their gifts and their culture."

"No," he rejoined, "but because of some subtle likeness or attractiveness which draws one to the other. I find it in you, without knowing why. You—I hoped—found it——"

His voice became troubled; he dropped his eyes. Ethel trembled—she loved him, poor girl, and she thought that he suffered as she had suffered, and she was sorry for him. But her outraged pride would not let her make any advance as yet.

"I may be a fatuous fool," said Oliver, after an agitated pause, "but I thought you loved me."

"I do love you," cried Ethel, passionately.

"And yet you suspect me of being false to you."

"Not suspect—not suspect"—she said, incoherently, and then was suddenly folded in Oliver's arms, and felt that the time for reproach or inquiry had gone by.

She was not sorry that matters had ended in this way, although she felt it to be illogical. With his kisses upon her mouth, with the pressure of his arm enfolding her, it was almost impossible for her to maintain, in his presence, a doubt of him. It was when he had gone that all the facts which he had ignored came back to her with torturing insistence, and that she blamed herself for not having refused to be reconciled to him until she had ascertained the truth or untruth of a report that had reached her ears.

With a truer lover she might have gone unsatisfied to her dying day. A faithful-hearted man might never have perceived where she was hurt; he would not have been astute enough to discover that he might heal the wound by a few timely words of explanation, Oliver, keenly alive to his own interests, reopened the subject a few days later of his own accord.

They had completely made up their quarrel—to all outward appearance, at any rate—and were sitting together one afternoon in Ethel's obnoxious drawing-room. They had been laughing together at some funny story of Ethel's associates at the theatre, and to the laughter had succeeded a silence, during which Oliver possessed himself of the girl's hand and carried it gently to his lips.

"Ethel," he said, softly, "what made you so angry with me the other day?"

"Your bad behavior, I suppose!" she said, trying to treat the matter in her usual lively fashion.

"But what *was* my bad behavior? Did it consist in going so often to the Brookes'?"

"Oh, what does it matter?" exclaimed Ethel, petulantly. "Didn't we agree to forgive and forget? If we didn't, we ought to have done. I don't want to look back."

"But you are doing an injustice to me. Ethel, I dare not say to you that I *insist* on knowing what it was. But I very strongly *wish* that you would tell me—so that I might at least try to set your mind at rest."

"Well," said Ethel, quickly, "if you *must* know—it was only a bit of gossip—servants gossip. I know all that can be said respecting the foolishness of listening to gossip from such a source—but I can't help it. One of the maids at Mr. Brooke's——"

"Sarah?" asked Oliver, with interest. "Sarah never liked me."

"No, it was not Sarah—it was that maid of Lesley's—Kingston her name is, I believe—who said to one of our servants one day that you went there a great deal oftener than she would like, if she were in my place. There! I have made a full confession. It was a petty spiteful bit of gossip, of course, and I ought not to have listened to it—but then it seemed so natural—and I thought it might be true!"

"What seemed natural?" said Oliver, who, against his will, was looking very black.

"Why, that you should like Lesley; she is the sweetest girl I ever came across."

In his heart Oliver echoed that opinion, but he felt morally bound to deny it.

"You say so only because you have never seen yourself! My darling, how could you accuse me merely on servants' evidence!"

"Is there *no* truth in it, Oliver?"

"None in the least."

"But you do go there very often!"

Then Oliver achieved a masterpiece of diplomacy. "My dear Ethel," he said, "I will go there no more until you go with me. I will not set foot in the house again."

He knew very well that Mr. Brooke would not admit him. It was clever to make a virtue of necessity.

"No, no, please don't do that! Go as often as you please."

"It was simply out of kindness to a lonely girl. I played her accompaniments for her sometimes, and listened to her singing. But as you dislike it, Ethel, I promise you that I will go there no more."

"Oh, Oliver, forgive me! I don't doubt you a bit. Do go to see Lesley as often as you can. I should *like* you to do it. Go for my sake."

But Oliver was quite obdurate. No, he would not go to the Brookes' again, since Ethel had once objected to his



going. And on this pinnacle of austere virtue he remained, thereby reducing Ethel to a state of self-abasement, which spoke well for his chances of mastery in the married life which loomed before him.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## LADY ALICE'S PHILANTHROPY.

MEANWHILE, Lady Alice Brooke, in pursuit of her new fancy for philanthropy and the sick poor, had wandered somewhat aimlessly into other wards beside those set apart for women and children—at first the object of her search. She strayed—I use the word “strayed” designedly, for she certainly did not do it of set purpose—with one of the nurses into accident wards, into the men’s wards, where her flowers and fruits and gentle words made her welcome, and where the bearded masculine faces, worn sometimes by pain and privation of long standing, appealed to her sensibilities in a new and not altogether unpleasant way.

For Lady Alice was a very feminine creature, and liked, as most women do like, to be admired and adored. She had confessed as much when she told the story of her life to her daughter Lesley. And she had something less than her woman’s due in this respect. Caspar Brooke had very honestly loved and admired her, but in a protective and slightly “superior” way. The earl, her father, belonged to that conservative portion of the aristocratic class which treats its womankind with distinguished civility and profoundest contempt. In her father’s home Lady Alice felt herself of no account. As years increased upon her, the charm of her graceful manner was marred by advancing self-distrust. In losing (as she, at least, thought) her physical attractions, she lost all that entitled her to consideration amongst the men and women with whom she lived. She had no fixed position, no private fortune, nothing that would avail her in the least when her father died; and the gentle coldness of her manner did not encourage women to intimacy, or invite men to pay her attentions that she would scorn. In any other situation, her natural gifts and virtues would have fairer play. As a spinster, she would still have had lovers; as a widow, suitors by the dozen; as a happily married woman she would have

been courted, complimented, flattered, by all the world. But, as a woman merely separated from a husband with whom she had in the first instance eloped, living on sufferance, as it were, in her father's house, "neither maid, wife, nor widow," she was in a situation which became more irksome and more untenable every year.

To a woman conscious of such a jar in her private life, it was really a new and delightful experience to find herself in a place where she could be of some real use, where she was admired and respected and flattered by that unconscious flattery given us sometimes by the preference of the sick and miserable. The men in one of the accident wards were greatly taken with Lady Alice. There was her title, to begin with ; there were her gracious accents, her graceful figure, her gentle, beautiful face. The men liked to see her come in, liked to hear her talk—although she was decidedly slow, and a little irresponsive in conversation. It soon leaked out, moreover, that material benefits followed in the wake of her visits. One man, who left the hospital, returned one day to inform his mates that "the lady" had found work for him on her father's estate, and that he considered himself a "made man for life." The attentions of such men who were not too ill to be influenced by such matters were henceforth concentrated upon Lady Alice ; and she, being after all a simple creature, believed their devotion to be genuine, and rejoiced in it.

With one patient, however, she did not for some time establish any friendly relations. He had been run over, while drunk, the nurses told her, and very seriously hurt. He lay so long in a semi-comatose condition that fears were entertained for his reason, and when the mist gradually cleared away from his brain, he was in too confused a state of mind for conversation to be possible.

Lady Alice went to look at him from time to time, and spoke to the nurse about him ; but weeks elapsed before he seemed conscious of the presence of any visitor. The nursing sister told the visitor at last that the man had spoken and replied to certain questions : that he had seemed uncertain about his own name, and could not give any coherent account of himself. Later on, it transpired that the man had allowed his name to be entered as "John Smith."

"Not his own name, I'm certain," the nurse said, decidedly.

"Why not?" Lady Alice asked, with curiosity.

"It's too common by half for his face and voice," the Sister answered, shrewdly. "If you look at him or speak to him, you'll find that that man's a gentleman."

"A gentleman—picked up drunk in the street?"

"A gentleman by birth or former position, I mean," said the Sister, rather dryly. "No doubt he has come down in the world; but he has been, at any rate, what people call an educated man."

Lady Alice's prejudices were stirred in favor of the broken-down drunkard by this characterization; and she made his acquaintance as soon as he was able to talk. Her impression coincided with that of the Sister. The man had once been a gentleman—a cultivated, well-bred man, from whom refinement had never quite departed. Over and above this fact there was something about him which utterly puzzled Lady Alice. His face recalled to her some one whom she had known, and she could not imagine who that some one might be. The features, the contour of the face, the expression, were strangely familiar to her. For, by the refining forces which sickness often applies, the man's face had lost all trace of former coarseness or commonness: it had become something like what it had been in the days of his first youth. And the likeness which puzzled Lady Alice was a very strong resemblance to the patient's sister, Rosalind Romaine.

Lady Alice was attracted by him, visited his bedside very often, and tried to win his confidence. But "John Smith" had, at present, no confidence to give. Questions confused and bewildered him. His brain was in a very excitable condition, the doctor said, and he was not to be tormented with useless queries. By the time his other injuries had been cured, he might perhaps recover the full use of his mind, and could then give an account of himself if he liked. Till then he was to be let alone; and so Lady Alice contented herself with bringing him such gifts as the authorities allowed, and with talking or reading to him a little from time to time in soothing and friendly tones. It was to be noted that before long his eyes followed her with interest as she crossed the ward; that his brow cleared when she spoke to him, and that all her movements were watched by him with

great intentness. In spite of this she could not get him to reply with anything but curtness to her inquiries after his health and general welfare; and it was quite a surprise to her when one day, on her visit to him, he accosted her of his own accord.

"Won't you sit down?" he said suddenly.

"Thank you. Yes, I should like to sit and read to you a little if you are able——"

"It isn't for that," he said, interrupting her unceremoniously; "it's because I have something special to say to you. If you'll stoop down a moment I'll say it—I don't want any one else to hear."

In great surprise, Lady Alice bowed her head.

"I want to tell you," he said gruffly, "that you're wasting your time and your money. These men in the ward are not really grateful to you one bit. They speculate before you come as to how much you are likely to give them, and when you are gone they compare notes and grumble if you have not given them enough."

"I do not wish to hear this," said Lady Alice, with dignity.

"I know you do not; but I think it is only right to tell you. Try them: give them nothing for a visit or two, and see whether they won't sulk and look gloomy, although you may talk to them as kindly as ever——"

"And if they did," said Lady Alice, with a sudden flash of energy and insight which amazed herself, "who could blame them, considering the pain they have suffered, and the brutal lives they lead? Why should they listen to my poor words, if I go to them without a gift in my hand?"

She spoke as she would have spoken to an equal—an unconscious tribute to the refinement which stamped this man as of a higher calibre than his fellows.

"It is a convenient doctrine for them," said John Smith, and buried his head in the bedclothes as if he wanted to hear nothing more.

For Lady Alice's next two visits he would not look up, or respond when she came near him, which she never failed to do; but on the third occasion he lifted his head.

"Well, madam," he said, "you have after all been trying my plan, I hear. Do you find that it works well?"

Lady Alice hesitated. The averted faces and puzzled, downcast—sometimes sullen—looks of the sick men and

boys to whom she had of late given nothing but kind words, had grieved her sorely.

"I suppose it proves the truth, in part, of what you say," she answered gently, "but on the other hand I find that my gifts have been judged excessive and unwise. It seems that I have a great deal to learn in the art of giving : it does not come by nature, as some suppose. I have consulted the doctors and nurses—and I have to thank you for giving me a warning."

A look of surprise passed across the man's face.

"You're better than some of them," he said, curtly. "I thought you'd never look at me again. I don't know why I should have interfered. But I did not like to see you cheated and laughed at."

Lady Alice colored, but she felt no resentment against the man, although he had shown her that she had made herself ridiculous when she was bent on playing Lady Bountiful, and posing as an angel of light. She said after a moment's pause—

"I believe you meant kindly. Is there nothing that I can do for you?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so—I can't remember very well. The doctors say I shall remember by and by. Then I shall know."

"And if I can, you will let me help you?"

"I suppose I ought to be only too glad," said the patient, with a sort of sullenness, which Lady Alice felt that she could but dimly understand. "I suppose I'm the sort of man to *be* helped ; and yet I can't help fancying there's a—Past—a Past behind me—a life in which I once was proud of my independence. But it strikes me that this was very long ago."

He drew the bedclothes over his head again, and made no further reply. Lady Alice came to see him after this conversation as often as the rules of the hospital would allow her ; and, although she seemed to get little response from him, the fact really remained that she was establishing an ascendancy over the man such as no nurse or doctor in the place had yet maintained. Others noticed it beside herself ; but she, disheartened a little by her disappointment in some of the other patients, did not recognize the reality of his attachment to her. And an event occurred about the time which put John Smith and hospital matters out of her head for a considerable time to come.

Old Lord Courtleroy died suddenly. He was an old man, but so hale and hearty that his death had not been expected in the least ; but he was found dead in his bed one morning, and the doctors pronounced that his complaint had been heart disease. The heir to the title and estate was a distant cousin whom Lady Alice and her father had never liked ; and when he entered upon his possessions, Lady Alice knew that the time had come for her to seek a home elsewhere. She had sufficient to live upon ; indeed, for a single woman, she was almost rich ; but the loneliness of her position once more forced itself upon her, especially as Lesley was not by her side to cheer her gradually darkening life.

She wrote the main facts concerning Lord Courtleroy's death and the change in her circumstances in short, rather disjointed letters to Lesley, and received very tender replies ; but even then she felt a vague dissatisfaction with the girl's letters. They were full of a wistfulness which she could not understand : she felt that something remote had crept into them, some aloofness for which she could not account. And as Captain Harry Duchesne happened to come across her one day, and inquired very particularly after Miss Brooke, she induced him to promise to call on Lesley when he was in London, and to report to her all that Lesley did or said. If it was a somewhat underhand proceeding, she told herself that she was justified by her anxiety as a mother.

Lord Courtleroy had left a considerable sum to Lesley, and when mother and daughter were reunited, as Lady Alice hoped that they would shortly be, there was no question as to their having means enough and to spare. Lady Alice began to dream of a dear little country house in Sussex, with an occasional season in London, or a winter at Bagnères. She was recalled from her dreams to the realities of life by a letter from her husband. Caspar Brooke wrote to ask whether, under present circumstances, she would not return to him.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## CAPTAIN DUCHESNE.

LESLEY's life seemed to her now much less lonely than it had been at first. The consciousness of having made friends was pleasant to her, although her affection for Ethel had been for a time overshadowed by the recollection of Oliver's unfaithfulness. But when this impression passed away, as it gradually did, after the scene that had been so painful to her, she consoled herself with the belief that Oliver's words and actions had proceeded from a temporary derangement of judgment, for which he was not altogether responsible, and that he had returned to his allegiance ; therefore she might continue to be friendly with Ethel without any sensation of treachery or shame. An older woman than Lesley would not, perhaps, have argued in this way : she would have suspected the permanence of Oliver's feelings more than Lesley did. But, being only an inexperienced girl, Lesley comforted herself by the fact that Oliver now avoided her ; and said that it could not be possible for her to have attracted him away from Ethel, who was so winning, so sweet, so altogether delightful.

Then, apart from the Kenyons, she began to make pleasant acquaintances amongst her father's friends. Caspar Brooke's house was a centre of interest and entertainment for a large number of intellectual men and women ; and Lesley had as many opportunities for wearing her pretty evening gowns as she could have desired. There were "at homes" to which her charming presence and her beautiful voice attracted Caspar's friends in greater numbers than ever : there were dinner-parties where her interest in the new world around her made everything else interesting ; and there was a constant coming and going of people who had work to do in the world, and who did it with more or less success, which made the house in Woburn Place anything but a dull abode.



The death of her grandfather distressed her less from regret for himself than from anxiety for her mother's future. Lady Alice's notes to her were very short and somewhat vaguely worded. It was, therefore, with positive joy that, one afternoon in spring, she was informed by her maid that Captain Duchesne was in the drawing-room, for she felt sure that he would be able to tell her many details that she did not know. She made haste to go down, and yet, before she went, she paused to say a word to Kingston, who had brought her the welcome news.

"I wish you would go out, Kingston; you don't look at all well, and this spring air might do you good."

It was certainly easy to see that Kingston was not well. During the past few weeks her face had become positively emaciated, her eyes were sunken, and her lips were white. She looked like a person who had recently passed through some illness or misfortune. Lesley had tried, delicately and with reserve, to question her; but Kingston had never replied to any of her inquiries. She would shut up her lips, and turn away with the look of one who could keep a secret to the grave.

"Nothing will do me good, ma'am," she answered dryly.

"Oh, Kingston, I am so sorry!"

"Go down to your visitor, ma'am, and don't mind me," said Kingston, turning her back on the girl with unusual abruptness. "It isn't much that I've got to be sorry for, after all."

"If there is anything I can do to help you, you will let me know, will you not?" said Lesley.

But Kingston's "Yes, ma'am," fell with a despairing cadence on her ear.

Kingston had been to her husband's lodgings only to find that he had disappeared. He had left some of his clothes, and the few articles of furniture that belonged to his wife, and had never said that he was going away. The accident that had made Francis Trent a patient at the hospital where Lady Alice visited was of course unknown to his landlady, as also to his wife. And as his memory did not return to him speedily, poor Mary Trent had been left to suffer all the tortures of anxiety for some weeks. At first she thought that some injury had happened to him—perhaps that he was dead: then a harder spirit took posses-

sion of her, and she made up her mind that he had finally abandoned her—had got money from Oliver and departed to America without her. She might have asked Oliver whether this were so, but she was too proud to ask. She preferred to eat out her heart in solitude. She believed herself deserted for ever, and the only grain of consolation that remained to her was the hope of making herself so useful and acceptable to Lesley Brooke, that when Leslie married she would ask Mary Kingston to go with her to her new home.

Kingston had made up her mind about the man that Lesley was to marry. She had seen him come and go : she had seen him look at her dear Miss Lesley with ardently admiring eyes : she believed that he would be a true and faithful husband to her. But she knew more than Lesley was aware of yet.

Lesley went slowly down into the drawing-room. She remembered Captain Duchesne very well, and she was glad to think of seeing him again. And yet there was an indefinable shrinking—she did not know how or why. Harry Duchesne was connected with her old life—with the Paris lights, the Paris drawing-rooms, the stately old grandfather, the graceful mother—the whole assembly of things that seemed so far away. She did not understand her whole feeling, but it suddenly appeared to her as if Captain Duchesne's visit was a mistake, and she had better get it over as soon as possible.

It must be confessed that this sensation vanished as soon as she came into the actual presence of Captain Duchesne. The young man, with his grave, handsome features, his drooping, black moustache, his soldierly bearing, had an attraction for her after all. He reminded her of the mother whom she loved.

It was not very easy to get into conversation with him at first. He seemed as ill at ease as Lesley herself had been. But when she fell to questioning him about Lady Alice, his tongue became unloosed.

"She does not know exactly what to do. She talks of taking a house in London—if you would like it."

"Would mamma care to live in London?"

"Not for her own sake : for yours."

"But I—I do not think I like London so much," said Lesley, with a swift blush and some hesitation. Captain Duchesne looked at her searchingly.

"Indeed? I understood that you had become much attached to it. I am sure Lady Alice thinks so."

"I do love it—yes, but it is on account of the people who live in London," said Lesley.

"Ah, you have made friends?"

"There is my father, you know."

"Yes." And something in his tone made Lesley change the subject hurriedly. Captain Duchesne would never have been so ill-bred as to speak disparagingly of a lady's father to her face; and yet she felt that there was something disparaging in the tone.

"Have you seen the present Lord Courtleroy?" she asked.

"Yes; I have met him once or twice. He is somewhat stiff and rigid in appearance, but he is very courteous—more than courteous, Lady Alice tells me, for he is kind. He wishes to disturb her as little as possible—entreats her to stay at Courtleroy, and so on; but naturally she wishes to have a house of her own."

"Of course. But I thought that she would prefer the South of France."

"If I may say so without offence," said Captain Duchesne, smiling, "Lady Alice's tastes seem to be changing. She used to love the country and inveigh against the ugliness of town; but now she spends her time in visiting hospitals and exploring Whitechapel——"

Lesley almost sprang to her feet. "Oh, Captain Duchesne, are you in earnest?"

"Quite in earnest."

"Oh, I *am* so glad!"

"Why, may I ask?" said Duchesne, with real curiosity. But Lesley clasped her hands tightly together and hung her head, feeling that she could not explain to a comparative stranger how she felt that community of interests might tend to a reconciliation between the long separated father and mother. And in the rather awkward pause that followed, Miss Ethel Kenyon was announced.

Lesley was very glad to see her, and glad to see that she looked approvingly at Captain Duchesne, and launched at once into an animated conversation with him. Lesley relapsed almost into silence for a time, but a satisfied smile played upon her lips. It seemed to her that Captain Duchesne's dark eyes lighted up when he talked to

Ethel as they had not done when he talked to *her*; that Ethel's cheeks dimpled with her most irresistible smile, and that her voice was full of pretty cadences, delighted laughter, mirth and sweetness. Lesley's nature was so thoroughly unselfish, that she could bear to be set aside for a friend's sake; and she was so ingenuous and single-minded that she put no strained interpretation on the honest admiration which she read in Harry Duchesne's eyes. It may have been partly in hopes of drawing her once more into the conversation that he turned to her presently with a laughing remark anent her love of smoky London.

"Oh, but it is not the smoke I like," Lesley answered. "It is the people."

"Especially the poor people," put in Ethel, saucily. "Now, I can't bear poor people; can you, Captain Duchesne?"

"I don't care for them much, I'm afraid."

"I like to do them good, and all that sort of thing," said Ethel. "Don't look so sober, Lesley! I like to act to them, or sing to them, or give them money; but I must say I don't like visiting them in the slums, or having to stand too close to them *anywhere*. I am so glad that you agree with me, Captain Duchesne!"

And not long afterwards she graciously invited him to call upon her on "her day," and promised him a stall at an approaching *matinee*, two pieces of especial favor, as Lesley knew.

Captain Duchesne sat on as if fascinated by the brilliant little vision that had charmed his eyes; and not until an unconscionable time had elapsed did he seem able to tear himself away. When he had gone, Ethel expressed herself approvingly of his looks and manners.

"I like those soldierly-looking men," she said. "So well set up and distinguished in appearance. Is he an old friend of yours, Lesley?"

"No, I have met him only once before. In Paris, he dined with us—with my grandfather, my mother, and myself."

"And he comes from Lady Alice now?"

"Yes, to bring me news of her."

Ethel nodded her bright little head sagaciously.

"It's very plain what Lady Alice wants, then?"

"What?" said Lesley, opening her eyes in wide amaze.

"She wants you to marry him, my dear."

"Nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense: don't get so red about it, you silly girl. What a baby you are, Lesley."

"I am sure mamma never thought of anything of the kind," said Lesley, with dignity, although her cheeks were still red.

"We shall see what we shall see. Well, I won't put my oar in—isn't that kind of me? But, indeed, your Captain Duchesne looks thoroughly ripe for a flirtation, and it will be as much as I can do to keep my hands off him."

"How would Mr. Trent like that?" said Lesley, trying to carry the war into the enemy's camp.

"He would bear it with the same equanimity with which he bears the rest of my caprices," said Ethel, merrily; but a shade crossed her brow, and she allowed Lesley to lead the conversation to the subject of her *trousseau*.

Captain Duchesne did not seem slow to avail himself of the favor accorded to him. He presented himself at Ethel's next "at home;" and devoted himself to her with curious assiduity. Even the discovery of her engagement to Mr. Trent did not change his manner. It was not so much that he paid her actual attention, as that he paid none to anybody else. When she was not talking to him, he kept silence. He seemed always to be observing her, her face, her manner, her dress, her attitude. Yet this kind of observation was quite respectful and unobtrusive: it was merely its continuity that excited remark. Oliver noticed it at last, and professed himself jealous: in fact he was a little bit jealous, although he did not love Ethel overmuch. But he had a pride of possession in her which would not allow him to look with equanimity on the prospect of her being made love to by anybody else.

Ethel enjoyed the attentions, and enjoyed Oliver's jealousy, in her usual spirit of childlike gaiety. She was quite assured of Oliver's affection for her now; and she looked forward with shy delight to the day of her wedding, which had been fixed for the twentieth of March.

Meanwhile, Oliver was devoured with secret anxiety. For what had become of Francis, and when would he appear to demand the money which had been promised to him on the day when the marriage should take place?

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## MR. BROOKE'S DESIRES.

LADY ALICE'S movements were not without interest to Caspar Brooke, although Lesley did not suspect the fact. It was quite a surprise to her when he entered the library one day, with apparently no other object than that of saying abruptly,

"What is your mother going to do, Lesley?"

"To do?" said Lesley, flushing slightly and looking astonished.

"Yes"—impatiently. "Where is she going to live? What will become of her? Do you want to go to her? I wish to hear what you know about her arrangements."

He planted himself on the hearth-rug in what might be termed an aggressive attitude—really the expression of some embarrassment of feeling. It certainly seemed hard to him at that moment to have to ask his daughter these questions.

"I think," said Lesley, with downcast eyes, "that she is trying to find a house to suit her in Mayfair."

"Mayfair. Then half her income will go in rent and taxes. Will she live there alone?"

"Yes. At least—unless—until——"

"Until you join her: I understand. Will"—and then he made a long pause before continuing—"if she wants you to join her at once, and you wish to go, don't let this previous arrangement stand in the way. I shall not interfere."

His curtness, his abruptness, would once have startled and terrified Lesley. She had of late grown so much less afraid of him, that now she only lifted her eyes, with a proud, grieving look in them, and said,

"Do you want me to go away, then?"

"*Want* you to go? Certainly not, child," and Mr. Brooke stretched out his hand, and drew her to him with a

caressing gesture. "No: I like to have you here. But I thought you wanted to go to her."

"So I do," said Lesley, the tears coming to her eyes. "But—I want to stay, too. I want"—and she put both hands on his arms with a gesture as affectionate as his own—"I want my father and mother both."

"I'm afraid that is an impossible wish."

"But why should it be?" said Lesley, looking up into his face beseechingly.

His features twitched for a moment with unwonted emotion. "You know nothing about it," he said—but he did not speak harshly. "You can't judge of the circumstances. What can I do? Even if I asked her she would not come back to me."

And then he put his daughter gently from him and went down to his study, where he paced up and down the floor for a good half-hour, instead of settling down as usual to his work.

But Lesley's words were not without their effect, although he had put them aside so decidedly. With that young, fair face looking so pleadingly into his own, it did not seem impossible that she should form a new tie between himself and his wife. Of course he had always known that children were conventionally supposed to bind the hearts of husband and wife to each other; but in his own case he had not found that a daughter produced that result. On the contrary, Lesley had been for many years a sort of bone of contention between himself and his wife; and he had retained a cynical sense of the futility of such conventional utterances, which were every day contradicted by barefaced facts.

But now he began to acknowledge that Lesley was drawing his heart closer to his wife. The charm of a family circle began to rise before him. Pleasant, indeed, would it be to find that his dingy old house bore once more the characteristics of a home; that womankind was represented in it by fairer faces and softer voices than the face and voice even of dear old Doctor Sophy, with her advanced theories, her committees, and her brisk disregard of the amenities of life. Yes, he would give a good deal to see Alice—it was long since he had thought of her by that name—established in his drawing-room (which she should refurbish and adorn to her heart's content), with Lesley by

her side, and himself at liberty to stroll in and out, to be smiled upon, and—yes, after all, this was his dearest wish—to dare to lavish the love of which his great heart was full upon the wife and child whose loss had been the misfortune of his life.

As he thought of the past years, it seemed to him that they had been very bleak and barren. True, he had done many things ; he had influenced many people, and accomplished some good work ; but what had he got out of it for himself? He was an Individualist at heart, as most men are, and he felt conscious of a claim which the world had not granted. It was almost a shock to him to feel the egoistic desire for personal happiness stirring strongly within him ; the desire had been suppressed for so long, that when it once awoke it surprised him by its vitality.

The outcome of these reflections was seen in a letter written that day after his talk with Lesley. He seated himself at last at his writing-table, and after some minutes' thought dashed off the following epistle. He did not stop for a word, he would not hesitate about the wording of sentences : it seemed to him that if he paused to consider, his resolution might be shaken, his purpose become unfixed.

“ My Dear Alice,” he wrote—“ I hear from Lesley that you are looking for a house. Would it not be better for us all if you made your home with me again? Things have changed since you left me, and I might now be better able to consult your tastes and wishes than I was then. We are both older and, I hope, wiser. Could we not manage to put aside some of our personal predilections and make a home together for our daughter? I use this argument because I believe it will have more weight with you than any other : at the same time, I may add that it is for my own sake, as well as for Lesley's, that I make the proposition. Your affectionate husband,

“ CASPAR BROOKE.”

It was an odd ending, he thought : he had certainly not shown himself an affectionate husband to her for many years. But there was truth in the epithet : little as she might believe it, or as it might appear. He would not



stop to re-read the letter: he had said what he wanted to say, and she could read his meaning easily enough. He had held out the olive branch. It was for her to accept or reject it, as she would.

Lesley could not understand why he was so restless and apparently uneasy during the next few days. He seemed to be looking for something—expecting something—nobody knew what. He spent more time than usual with her, and took a new interest in her affairs. She did not know that he was trying to put himself into training for domestic life, and that he found it unexpectedly pleasant.

"What's this?" he said one day, picking up a scrap of paper that fell from a book that she held in her hand. "Not a letter, I think? Have you been making extracts?"

"No," said Lesley, blushing violently, but not trying to take the paper from him.

"May I see it? Oh, a sort of essay—description—impressions of London in a fog." He murmured a few of the words and phrases as he went on. "Why, this is very good. Here's the real literary touch. Where did you get this, Lesley? It's not half bad."

As she made no answer, he looked up and saw the guilty laughter in her eyes, the conscious blushes on her cheeks.

"You don't mean to say——"

"I only wrote it to amuse myself," said Lesley, meekly. "I've had so little to do since I came here, and I thought I would scribble down my impressions."

"My dear child," said Mr. Brooke, "if you can write as well as this, you ought to have a career before you. Why," he added, surveying her, "I had no idea of this. And I always did have a secret wish that a child of mine should take to literature. My dear——"

"But I don't want to take to literature, exactly," said Lesley, with a little gasp. "I only want to amuse myself sometimes—just when I feel inclined, if you don't think it a great waste of time——"

"Waste of time? Certainly not. Go on, by all means. I shall only ask to see what you do now and then; I might be able to give you a hint—though I don't know. Your style is very good already—wants a little compression, perhaps, but you can make sentences—that's a comfort." And Mr. Brooke fell to reading the manuscript again, with a very pleased look upon his face.

It was while he was still reading that a servant brought in some letters which had just arrived. He opened the first that came to hand almost unthinkingly, for his mind was quite absorbed in the discovery which he had made. It was only when his eye rested on the first page of the letter that memory came back to him. He gave a great start, rose up, putting Lesley's paper away from him, and went to the other side of the room to read his letter. It was as follows :—

“DEAR MR. BROOKE,—

“I have already found a house that I think will suit me, and I hope that Lesley will join me there as soon as you can spare her. I am afraid that it is a little too late to change our respective ways of life. It would be no advantage to Lesley to live with parents who were not agreed.

“Yours very truly,

“ALICE BROOKE.”

Caspar Brooke turned round with a face that had grown strangely pale, walked across the room to Lesley, and dropped the letter in her lap.

“There !” he said. “I have done my uttermost. That is your mother's reply to me.”

He strode out of the room, without deigning to answer her cry of surprise and inquiry, and Lesley took up the letter.

It was with a burst of tears that she put it down. “Oh, mother, mother !” she cried to herself, “how can you be so unkind, so unjust, so unforgiving ? He is the best man in the world, and yet you have the heart to hurt him.”

She did not see her father again until the next day, and then, although she made no reference in words to the letter which she restored to him, her pale and downcast looks spoke for her, and told the sympathy which she did not dare to utter. Mr. Brooke kissed her, and felt vaguely comforted ; but it began to occur to him that he had made Lesley's position a hard one by insisting on her visit to his house, and that it might have been happier for her if she had remained hostile to himself, or ignorant of his existence. For now, when she went back to her mother, would not the affection that she evidently felt for him rise up as a barrier between herself and Lady Alice ? Would she not try to fight for him ? She was brave enough, and impetuous

enough, to do it. And then Alice might justly accuse him of having embittered the relation, hitherto so sweet, between mother and daughter, and thereby inflicted on her an injury which nothing on earth could repair or justify.

Could nothing be done to remedy this state of things? Caspar Brooke began to feel worried by it. His mind was generally so serene that the intrusion of a personal anxiety seemed monstrous to him. He found it difficult to write in his accustomed manner: he felt a diminution of his interest in the club. With masculine impatience of such an unwonted condition, he went off at last to Maurice Kenyon, and asked him seriously whether his brain, his heart, or his liver were out of order. For that something was the matter with him, he felt sure, and he wanted the doctor to tell him what it was.

Maurice questioned and examined him carefully, then assured him with a hearty laugh that even his digestion was in the best possible working order.

Brooke gave himself a shake like a great dog, looked displeased for a moment, and then burst out laughing too.

"I suppose it is nothing, after all," he said. "I've been a trifle anxious and worried lately. Nothing of any importance, my dear fellow. By the by, have you been to see Lesley lately?"

"May I speak to her?" said Maurice, his face brightening. "I thought——"

"Speak when you like," Caspar answered, curtly. "I almost wish you would get it over. Get it settled, I mean."

"I shall get it settled as soon as I can, certainly," said Maurice.

And Mr. Brooke went away, thinking that after all he had found one way of escape from his troubles. For if Lesley accepted Maurice, and lived with him in a house opposite her father's, there would always be a corner for him at their fireside, and he would not go to the grave feeling himself a childless, loveless, desolate old man.

It must be conceded that Mr. Brooke had sunk to a very low pitch of dejection when he was dominated by such thoughts as these.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## LESLEY'S PROMISE.

MAURICE was no backward lover. He made his way to Lesley that very day, and found her in the library—not, as usual, bending over a book, but standing by the window, from which could be seen a piece of waste ground overgrown with grass and weeds, and shaded by some great plane and elm trees. There was nothing particularly fascinating in the outlook, which partook of the usual grimness of a London atmosphere; but the young green of the budding trees spoke, in spite of the blackness of their branches, of spring and spring's delight; and there was a brightness in the tints of the tangled grass which gave a restful satisfaction to the eye. Lesley was looking out upon this scene with a wistfulness which struck Maurice with some surprise.

"You like this window?" he said, interrogatively, when they had shaken hands and exchanged a word or two of greeting.

"Yes, it reminds me in some way of my old convent home. I don't know why it should; but there are trees and grass and greenness."

"Ah, you love the country?"

"Do not you?"

"Yes, but there are better things in the world than even trees and grass."

"Ah, yes," said Lesley, eagerly. Then, with a little smile, she added, as if quoting—"Souls of men."

"I was thinking of their bodies," said the young doctor. "But that's as it should be. You think of the spiritual, I only of the material side. Both sides ought to be considered: that is where men and women meet, I take it."

"I suppose so," said Lesley, a little vaguely.

"I'm afraid," Maurice went on, "that it will be a long time before I have a country house of my own: a place where there will be trees and green meadows and flowers,

such as one loves and sighs for. I have often thought"—with a note of agitation in his voice—"how much easier it would be to ask any one to share my life if I had these good things to offer. My only chance has been to find some one who cares—as I care—for the souls and bodies of the men and women around us ; who would not disdain to help me in my work."

"Who *could* disdain it?" asked Lesley, innocently indignant.

"Do you mean"—turning suddenly upon her—"that you don't consider a hard working doctor's life something inexpressibly beneath you?"

She drew back a little hurt, a little bit astonished.

"Certainly not. Why should I?"

"You are born to a life of luxury and self-indulgence."

"My father is a journalist," said Lesley with a smile, in which amusement struggled with offence.

"But your grandfather was an earl! It is possible," with a touch of raillery, "that you prefer earls to general practitioners."

"Of the two, it is the doctor that leads the better life, in my opinion," said Lesley, rather hotly; but immediately cooling down, she added the remark—"My preferences have nothing much, however, to do with the matter."

"Have they not? How little you know your own power!"

Lesley looked at him in much amaze. Whether this conversation was tending it had not yet occurred to her to inquire. But something in his look, as he stood fronting her, brought the color to her cheeks and caused her eyes to sink. She became suddenly a little afraid of him, and wished herself a thousand miles away. Indeed she made one backward step, as if her maidenly instincts were about to manifest themselves in actual flight. But Maurice saw the movement, and made two steps forward, which brought him so close to her that he could have touched her hand if he had wished.

"Don't you understand?" he said, in an agitated voice. "Don't you see that your opinion—your preferences—are all the world to me?"

He paused as if expecting her to reply—leaning a little towards her to catch the word from her lips. But Lesley did not speak. She remained motionless, as pale now as she had been red before—her hands hanging at her sides

and her eyes fixed upon the ground. She looked as if she were stricken dumb with dismay.

"I know that I have not recommended myself to you by anything that I have said or done," Maurice went on. "I misjudged you once, and I spoke roughly, rudely, brutally; but it was the way you took what I said which made me understand you. You were so fine, so noble, so sweet! Instead of making my stupidity an excuse for shutting yourself away from what your father was doing, you immediately threw yourself into it, you began to work with him and for him—as of course I might have seen that you would do directly you came to know him. I was a fool, and you were an angel—that summarizes the situation."

A faint smile curled Lesley's lips, although she did not look up. "I am afraid there is not much of the angel about me," she said.

"Ah, you can't see yourself as others see you," he answered, quite ignoring the implication in her remark which a less ardent lover might have resented. "To me, at any rate, you are the one woman in the world, the only one I have ever loved—shall ever love as long as I live—the fulfilment of my ideal—the realization of all my dreams!

His vehemence made Lesley draw back.

"You exaggerate," she said with a slight shake of the head. "Indeed, I am not all that—I could not be. I am very ignorant and full of faults. I have a bad temper——"

"You have a temper that is sweetness itself!"

"Oh, Mr. Kenyon, how can you say so?"—with a look of reproach. "You who have seen me so angry!"

"Your temper is just like your father's," said Maurice, dogmatically. "A little hot, if you like, but sweet——"

"Something like preserved ginger?" asked Lesley.

The two young people looked at each other with laughter in their eyes. This was Lesley's way of trying to stave off the inevitable. If Maurice's declaration could only be construed into idle compliment, she would be rid of the necessity of giving him a plain answer. And what had been begun as a proposal of marriage seemed likely to degenerate into a fencing match.

Maurice saw the danger, and was too quick-witted to fall unawares into the trap which Lesley had laid for him. A war of words was the very thing in which he and Ethel

most delighted ; and it was usually quite easy to induce brother and sister to engage upon it. But on this occasion he was too much in earnest for word-play. He laughed at Lesley's simile, and then became suddenly and almost fiercely grave.

"I can't let you turn the whole thing into a joke," he said. "You know that I mean what I say. It is a matter of life and death to me. I love you with my whole heart, and I come to-day to know whether there is any chance for me—whether you can honor me with your love—whether you will one day consent to be my wife."

His voice sank to a pleading tone, and his face was very pale. But he felt that a great display of emotion would frighten and repel the girl, and he therefore sedulously avoided, as far as possible, any appearance of agitation. He could not, however, entirely achieve the calmness which he desired, and the very suppression of his agitation, which, in spite of himself, made his voice shake, and brought fire to his eyes, had an unwontedly unnerving effect upon Lesley.

"Oh, I don't know," she said hurriedly. "I can't tell—I never thought——"

"Think now," he said persuasively. "Am I disagreeable to you?"

"No,"—very softly.

"Have you forgiven me for my bad behavior in the past?"

"You never did behave badly."

"But you have forgiven me?"

"Oh, yes."

This was illogical, as she had previously intimated that there was nothing to forgive ; but, under such circumstances, Lesley may be excused.

"And—surely, then—you like me a little!"

"A little," Lesley breathed, rather than spoke, with an unconscious smile of happiness.

"Can you not call it 'loving?'" asked Maurice, daring for the first time to take her soft little hand in his.

But the question, the look, the touch, suddenly terrified Lesley, and brought back to her mind a long-forgotten promise. What was it her mother had required of her before she left Paris for her father's house? Was it not a pledge that she should not bind herself to marry any man?

—that she should not engage herself to be married? Lesley had an instinctive knowledge of the fact that to proclaim her promise would be to cast discredit on Lady Alice; and so, while trying to keep her word, she sought for means to avoid telling the whole truth.

"No, oh no," she said, withdrawing her hand at once and turning away. "Indeed, I could not. Please do not ask me any more."

The shock was very great to Maurice. He stood perfectly silent for a moment. He had thought that he was making such good progress—and, behold! the wind had suddenly changed; the face of the heavens was overcast. He tried to think that he had been mistaken, and made another attempt to win a favorable hearing.

"Miss Brooke—Lesley—you say you like me a little. Do you not think that your liking for me might grow? When you know that I love you so tenderly, that I would lay down my very life for you, when you can hear all that I can tell you of my hopes, my dreams, my aspirations——"

"I do not want to hear," said Lesley, putting out her hand blindly. "Please do not tell me: it makes me miserable—indeed, I must not listen."

Again Maurice stood silent for a moment.

"*Must* not listen?" he repeated at length, with a keen look at her. "Why must you not?"

Lesley made no answer.

"You speak strangely," said Kenyon, with some slight coldness beginning to manifest itself in his manner. "Why should you not listen to me? If you are thinking of your father, I can assure you that he has no objection to me. I have consulted him already. He would be honestly glad, I believe, if you could care for me—he has told me so. Does his opinion go for nothing?"

She shook her head.

"I can't explain," she said brokenly. "I can only ask you not to say anything—at least—I have promised——"

"Promised not to listen to me?"

"To anything of the kind," said Lesley, feeling that she was making a terrible mess of the whole affair, and yet unable to loosen her tongue sufficiently to explain.

"May I ask to whom you gave this promise?"

"No," said Lesley.



There was another silence, but this time it was a silence charged with ominous significance. Maurice's face was very white, and a peculiar rigidity showed itself in the lines of his features. He was very much disappointed, and he also felt that he had some right to be displeased.

"If you were bound by any such promise, Miss Brooke," he said, "I think it would have been better that your friends should have known of it. I don't think that Mr. Brooke was aware——"

"Oh, no, he knew nothing about it."

"It was a promise made before you came here?"

"Yes."

"Of which your mother—Lady Alice—approves?"

"Oh, yes—it was to her—because she——"

Lesley stammered and tried to explain. There was a tremendous oppression upon her, such as one feels sometimes in a nightmare dream. She longed to speak out, to clear herself in Maurice's eyes, and yet she could not frame a single intelligible sentence. It was as though she were afflicted with dumbness.

"I think," said Maurice, deliberately, "that your father and your aunt had a right to know this fact. You seem to have kept them in ignorance of it. And I have been led into a mistake. I can assure you, Miss Brooke, that if I had been aware of any previous promise—or—or engagement of yours, I should never have presumed to speak as I have spoken to-day. I can but apologize and withdraw."

Before Lesley could answer, he had taken his hat, bowed profoundly, and left the room.

And Lesley, with lips from which all color had faded, and hands pressed tightly together, watched him go, and stood for some minutes in dazed, despairing silence before she could say, even to herself, with a burst of hot and bitter tears,

"Oh, I did not mean him to think *that*. And now I cannot explain! What shall I do? What *can* I do to make him understand?"

But that was a question for which she found no answer.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## CURED.

"You are quite well," said the doctor to John Smith, otherwise called Francis Trent, at the great hospital one day. "You can go out to-morrow. There is nothing more that we can do for you."

Smith raised his dull eyes to their faces.

"Am I—cured?" he asked.

One of the doctors shrugged his shoulders a little. Another answered kindly and pityingly,

"You will find that you are not as strong as you used to be. Not the same man in many respects. But you will be able to get your own living, and we see no reason for detaining you here. What was your trade?"

The patient looked down at his white, thin hands. "I don't know," he said.

"Have you friends to go to?"

There was a pause. Some of the medical students who were listening came a little nearer. As a matter of fact, Francis Trent's future depended very largely on the answer he made to this question. The statement that he was "quite well" was hazarded rather by way of experiment than as a matter of fact. The doctors wanted to know what he would say and do under pressure, for some of them were beginning to suggest that the man should be removed to the workhouse infirmary or a lunatic asylum. His faculties seemed to be hopelessly beclouded.

Suddenly he lifted his head. A new sharp light had come into his eyes. He nodded reassuringly.

"Yes, I have friends," he said.

"You have a home where you can go? Shall we write to your friends to meet you?"

"No, thank you, sir. I can find my own way home."

And then they conferred together a little, and left him, and reported that he was cured.

Certainly, there seemed to be nothing the matter with him now. His wounds and injuries had healed, his bodily

strength was returning. But the haze which hung over his mind was far more impenetrable than the doctors guessed. Something of it had been apparent to them in the earlier days of his illness ; but his clear and decided answers to their questions convinced them that memory had to some extent returned. As a matter of fact it was not memory that had returned, but a sharpening of his perceptive faculties, awakening him to the fact that he stood in danger of being taken for an idiot or a madman if he did not frame some answer to the questions which the doctors asked him. This new acuteness was perhaps the precursor to a return of his memory ; but as yet the Past was like a dead wall, an abyss of darkness surrounding him. Now and then flashes of light seemed to dart across that darkness : he seemed on the point of recalling something—he knew not what ; for the flashes faded as quickly as they came, and made the darkness all the greater for the contrast.

He was possessed now by the idea that if he could get out of hospital, and walk along the London streets, he might remember all that he had forgotten. His own name, his own history, had become a blank to him. He knew in some vague, forlorn fashion, that he had once been what the world calls a gentleman. He had not acknowledged so much to the doctors : he had not felt that they would believe him. Even when the groping after the Past became most painful, he made up his mind that he would not ask these scientific men for help : he was afraid of being treated as a "case," experimented on, written about in the papers. There was something in the Past of which he knew he ought to be ashamed. What could it be ? He was afraid to ask, lest he might find himself to be a criminal.

In these haunting terrors there was, of course, a distinct token of possible insanity. The man needed a friendly, guiding hand to steer him back to the world of reason and common-sense. But to whom could he go, since he had taken up this violent prejudice against the doctors ? He felt drawn to none of the nurses, although some of them had been very kind to him. The only person to whom he might perhaps have disburthened himself, if he had had the opportunity, was the sweet-voiced, sweet-faced woman whom he had warned of the ill effects of her gifts. He did not know her name, or anything about her ; but before he left the hospital he asked one of the nurses who she was,

"Lady Alice Brooke—daughter of the Lord Courtleroy, who died the other day," was the reply.

"Could you give me her address?"

"No; and I don't think that if I could it would be of any use to you. She is leaving England, I believe. If you want work or help, why don't you speak to Mr. Kenyon? He's the gentleman to find both for you—Mr. Maurice Kenyon."

"Which is Mr. Kenyon?"

"There—he's just passing through the next ward; shall I speak to him for you?"

"No, thank you: I don't want anything from him: I only wanted the lady's name," said John Smith, in a dogged sullen kind of way, which made the whitecapped nurse look at him suspiciously.

"Brooke!—Kenyon?"—How oddly familiar the names seemed to him! Of course they were not very uncommon names; but there was a distinct familiarity about them which had nothing to do with the names themselves, as if they had some connection with his own history and his own affairs.

He was discharged—"cured." He went out into the streets with half-a-crown in his pocket, and a fixed determination to know the truth, sooner or later, about himself. At the same time he had a great fear of letting any one know the extent of the blanks in his memory. He thought that people might shut him up in a madhouse if he told them that he could not recollect his own name. A certain amount of intellectual force and knowledge remained to him. He could read, and understand what he read. But of his own history he had absolutely no idea; and the only clue to it that he could find lay in those two names—Brooke and Kenyon.

Could he discover anything about the possessors of these names which would help him? He entered a shop where a Post Office Directory was to be found, and looked at Maurice Kenyon's name amongst the doctors. He found Mr. Kenyon's private address; but as yet it told him nothing. Woburn Place? Well, of course he had heard of Woburn Place: it was no wonder that he should know it so well; but the name told him nothing more.

He sat staring at it so long that the people of the shop grew impatient, and asked him to shut the book. He went

away, and wandered about the streets, vaguely seeking for he knew not what. And after a time he bought a newspaper. Here again he found the name that had attracted his attention—the name of Kenyon. “Last appearance of Miss Kenyon at the Frivolity Theatre—this week only.”

“Who’s Miss Ethel Kenyon?” he asked—drawing a bow at a venture—of his neighbor in the dingy little coffee-house into which he had turned. It was ten to one that the man would not know; but he would ask.

As it happened, the young nan did know. “She’s an actress,” he said. “I went to see her the other night. Pretty girl—going to get married and leave the stage. My brother’s a scene shifter at the Frivolity—knows all about her.”

“Who is she going to marry?”

“Oh, I don’t know—some idle young chap that wants her money, I believe. She ain’t the common sort of actress, you know. Bit of a swell, with sixty thousand pounds of her own.”

“Oh,” said his interlocutor, vaguely. “And—has she any relations?”

“Well, that I can’t tell you. Stop a bit, though: I did hear tell of a brother—a doctor, I believe. But I couldn’t be sure of it.”

“Could you get to know if you wanted?”

The young fellow turned and surveyed his questioner with some doubt. “Dare say I could if I chose,” he said. “What do you want to know for, mate?”

“I’ve been away—out of England for a long time—and I think they’re people who used to know me,” said Francis Trent, improvising his story readily. “I thought they could put me on the way of work if I could come across them; but I don’t know if it’s the same.”

“Why don’t you go to see her to-night? She’s worth a look: she’s a pretty little thing—but she don’t draw crowds: the gallery’s never full.”

“I think I’ll go to-night,” said Francis, rising suddenly from his seat. He fancied that the young man looked at him suspiciously. “Yes, no doubt, I should know her if I saw her: I’ll go to-night.”

He made his way hastily into the street, while his late companion sent a puzzled glance after him. “Got a tile loose, that chap has,” he said to the girl at the counter as he also passed out. “Or else he was a bit screwed.”

So that night Francis Trent went to the Frivolity, and witnessed, from a half-empty gallery, a smart, sparkling little society play, in which Ethel Kenyon had elected to say farewell to her admirers.

He saw her, but her face produced no impression upon his mind.

It was not familiar to him, although her name was familiar enough. Those gleaming dark eyes in the saucy piquante face, the tiny graceful figure, the silvery accents of her voice, were perfectly strange to him. They suggested absolutely nothing. It was the name alone that he knew; and he was sure that it was in some way connected with his own.

Before the end of the play, he got up and went out. The lights of the theatre made him dizzy: his head ached from the hot atmosphere and from his own physical weakness. He was afraid that he should cry out or do something strange which would make people look at him, if he sat there much longer. So he turned into a side street and leaned against a wall for a little time, until he felt cool and refreshed. The evening was warm, considering that the month was March, and the air that played upon his face was soft and balmy. When he had recovered himself a little, he noticed a group of young men lighting their cigarettes and loitering about a door in the vicinity. Presently he made out that this was the stage-door, and that these young men were waiting to see one of the actresses come out. By the fragments of their talk that floated to him on the still evening air in the quiet side street, Francis Trent gathered that they spoke a good deal of Ethel Kenyon.

"So this is the last we shall see of pretty little Ethel," he heard one man say. "Who's the man she's hooked, eh?"

Nobody seemed to know.

"Why did she go on the boards at all, I wonder? She's got money, and belongs to a pre-eminently respectable family. Her brother's a doctor."

"Stage-struck," said another. "She'll give it up now, of course. Here's her carriage. She'll be here directly."

"And the happy man at her heels," I suppose, sneered the first speaker. "They say she's madly in love with him, and that he, of course, wants her money."

"He's a cad, I know that," growled a younger man.

Impelled by an interest of which he himself did not know the source, Francis Trent had drawn nearer to the stage door as the young fellows spoke. He was quite close to it, when it opened at last and the pretty actress came forth.

She was escorted by a train of admirers, rich and poor. Her maid was laden with wraps and bouquets. The manager and the actor who played the leading part were on either side of her, and Ethel was laughing the merry, unaffected laugh of a perfectly happy woman as she made her triumphal exit from the little theatre where she had achieved all her artistic success. Another kind of success, she thought, was in store for her now. She was to know another sort of happiness. And the whole world looked very bright to her, although there was one little cloud—no bigger than a man's hand, perhaps—which had already shown itself above the horizon, and might one day cloud the noontide of her love.

Francis Trent was so absorbed in watching her lovely face, and in wondering why her name had seemed so familiar, that he paid scant attention to her followers. It was only as the carriage drove off that his eye was caught by the face of a man who sat beside her. A gleam from a gas-lamp had fallen full upon it, revealing the regular, passionless features, the dark eyes and pale complexion of Ethel's lover. And as soon as he saw that face, a great change came over the mental condition of Francis Trent. He stood for a moment as if paralyzed, his worn features strangely convulsed, a strange lurid light showed itself in his haggard eyes. Then he threw his arms wildly in the air, uttered a choked, gasping cry, and rushed madly and vainly after the retreating carriage, heedless of the shouts which the little crowd sent after him.

"He's mad—he'll never catch up that carriage! What does he run after it for, the fool?" said one of the men on the pavement.

And indeed he soon relinquished the attempt, and sat down on a doorstep, panting and exhausted, with his face buried upon his arms.

But he was not mad. He was sure of that now. It was only that he had—partially and feebly, but to some extent effectually—remembered what had happened to him in the dark dead Past.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## DOUBT.

It was a difficult matter for Maurice Kenyon so to word his report to Caspar Brooke as not to excite his displeasure against Lesley. He felt himself bound to respect Lesley's confidences—if such they might be called—respecting the promise which kept her from returning his love ; but he could not help a certain bitterness of tone in referring to his interview with her ; and his friend observed the bitterness.

“What reason did she give for refusing you ?” he asked sharply.

“I suppose she does not care for me.”

“There is something else—to judge from your look. Perhaps there is—somebody else ?” said Brooke.

“Well, I don't know that I'm doing right in telling you—but—God help me !—I believe there is,” said Maurice, with a groan.

“She did not tell you who ?”

“No.”

Mr. Brooke knitted his brows. He was inclined to think that Oliver Trent had produced an impression on Lesley's susceptible heart. He could not ask questions of any of the persons concerned ; but he had his suspicions, and they made him angry as well as anxious.

He made it his business during the next day or two to find out whether Oliver had been to the house since the day when he had interrupted the interview ; but he could not learn that he had ventured there again. It was no use asking Dr. Sophy about Lesley's comings and goings : it was almost impossible for him to question Lesley herself.

“What rubbish it all is—this love-making, marrying, and giving in marriage !” he said, at last, impatiently, to himself. “I'll think no more about these young folks' affairs—let them make or mar their happiness in their own way. I'll think of my work and nothing else—I've ne-



glected it a good deal of late, I fancy. I must make up for lost time now." And sitting down at his table, he turned over the papers upon it, and took up a quill pen. But he did not begin to write for some minutes. He sat frowning at the paper, biting the feathers of his pen, drumming with his fingers on the table. And after a time he muttered to himself, "If any man harms Lesley, I'll wring his neck—that's all;" which did not sound as though he were giving to his literary work all the attention that it required.

As to Lesley, she would have given a great deal at that time for a counsellor of some kind. The old feeling of friendlessness had come back to her. Her aunt was absorbed by her own affairs, her father looked at her with unquiet displeasure in his eyes. Oliver Trent had proved himself a false friend indeed. Ethel was a little reserved with her, and she had sent Maurice Kenyon away. There was nobody else to whom she could turn for comfort. True, she had made many acquaintances by this time: her father's circle was a large one, and she knew more people now than she had ever spoken to in her quiet convent days. But these were all acquaintances—not friends. She could not speak to any one of these about Maurice Kenyon, her lover and her friend. Once or twice she thought vaguely of writing to her mother about him; but she shrank from doing so without quite knowing why. The fact was, she knew her mother's criticism beforehand: she expected to be reproached with having broken her compact in the spirit if not in the letter; and she did not know how to justify herself. Maurice had taken his dismissal as final, and she had not meant him to do so. Now, if ever, the girl wanted a friend who would either encourage her to explain her position to him, or would do it for her. Lady Alice would not fill this post efficiently. And Lesley, in her youthful shamefaced pride, felt that nothing would induce her to make her own explanation to Maurice. It would seem like asking him to ask her again to marry him—an insupportable thought.

So she went about the house pale and heavy-eyed, trying with all her might to throw herself into her father's schemes for his club, writing a little now and then, occupying herself feverishly with all the projects that came in her way, but bearing a sad heart about with her all the time. She was not outwardly depressed—her pride would not let her

seem melancholy. She held her head high, and talked and laughed more than usual. But the want of color and brightness in her face and eye could not be controlled.

"You pale-faced wretch," she said to herself one Saturday evening, as she stood before her glass and surveyed the fair image that met her eye; "why cannot you look as usual? It must be this black dress that makes me so colorless: I wish that I had a flower to wear with it."

Mr. Brooke and his sister were holding one of their frequent Saturday evening parties, when they were "at home" to a large number of guests. Lesley was just about to go downstairs. Her dress was black, for she was in mourning for her grandfather; and it must be confessed that the sombre hue made her look very pale indeed. The wish for a flower was gratified, however, almost as soon as formed. Kingston entered her room at that moment carrying a bouquet of flowers, chiefly white, but with a scarlet blossom here and there, which would give exactly the touch of color that Lesley's appearance required.

"These flowers have just come for you, ma'am," Kingston said quietly.

Her subdued voice, her pale face, and heavily shadowed eyes, did not make her a cheerful-looking messenger; but Lesley, for the time being, thought of nothing but the flowers.

"Where do they come from, Kingston?" she asked, eagerly.

"I was only to say one word, ma'am—that they came from over the way."

There was no want of color now in Lesley's face. Her cheeks were rose-tinted, her eyes had grown strangely bright. "Over the way." Of course that meant Maurice. Did not he live over the way?—and was there any one else at the Kenyons' house who would send her such lovely flowers?

If he sent her flowers, she reflected, he could not have yet ceased to care for her, although she had behaved so badly to him—in his eyes, at least. The thought gave her courage and content. Perhaps he was coming that night—he had a standing invitation to all the Brookes' evening parties—and when he came he would perhaps "say something" to her, something which she could answer suitably, so as to make him understand,

She did not know how pretty she looked as she stood looking down at her flowers, the color and smile and dimples coming and going in her fair young face in very unwonted confusion. But Mary Kingston noted every change of tint and expression, and was surprised. For the little mystery was quite plain to her. It was not Mr. Kenyon who sent the flowers at all. Mr. Kenyon was too busy a man to buy bouquets. It was Oliver Trent who had sent them, for Kingston had herself seen him carrying the flowers and entrusting them to a commissionaire with a message for Miss Brooke. She believed, too, that Lesley knew from whom they came. But she was not sufficiently alert and interested just then to make these matters of great importance to her. She did not think it worth her while to say how much she knew. With a short quick sigh she turned away, and expected to see her young mistress quit the room at once, still with that happy smile upon her face. But Lesley had heard the sigh.

"Oh, Kingston," she said, laying her hand on the woman's arm, "I wish you would not sigh like that!"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am; I did not mean to annoy you."

"I don't mean *that*: I mean it for your own sake. You seem so sad about something—you have been sad so long!"

"I've had a sad life, Miss Lesley."

"But there is surely some special sadness now?"

"Yes," said the woman slowly. "Yes, that is true. I've—lost—a friend."

She put a strong emphasis on the word "lost," and paused before and after uttering it, as if it bore a peculiar meaning to her. But Lesley took the word in its ordinary sense.

"I am very sorry," she said. "It must be very terrible, I think, when one's friends die."

She stood silent for a minute—a shadow from Kingston's grief troubling the sweetness of her fair face. It was the maid who broke the silence.

"Excuse me, ma'am; I oughtn't to have troubled you with my affairs to-night, just when you're enjoying yourself too. But it's hard sometimes to keep quiet."

Moved by a sudden instinct of sympathy, Lesley turned and kissed the woman who served her, as if she had been a sister. It was in such ways that she showed her kinship

with the man who had written "The Unexplored." Lady Alicé, in spite of all her kindness of heart, would never have thought of kissing her ladies' maid.

"Don't grieve—don't be sorrowful," said Lesley. "Perhaps things will mend by and by."

"Ah, my dear," said Kingston, forgetting her position," as Lady Alice would have said, while that young, soft kiss was warm upon her cheek, "the dead don't come back."

And when Lesley had gone downstairs, with the white and scarlet bouquet in her hand, Mary Kingston sat down and wept bitterly.

It was not the first time that Lesley had spoken words of consolation to her; but on this occasion her gentleness had gone home to Mary Kingston's heart as it had never done before. After weeping for herself for a time, she fell to weeping for Lesley too, for it seemed inevitable to her that Lesley should suffer before very long. She believed that Lesley was in love with Oliver, and that for this reason only had she refused Maurice Kenyon, which shows that Lesley had kept her own secret very well.

"I'd do anything to keep her from harm," said Mary Kingston, with a passionate rush of gratitude towards the girl for her kindly words and ways. "Francis Trent brough me grief enough, God knows; and if she's going to throw herself away on Oliver, she'll have her heart broke sooner than mine. For I've been used to sorrow all my days; and she—poor, pretty lamb—she don't know what it means. And Miss Brooke all taken up with her medicine-fads, and Mr. Brooke only a *man*, after all, in spite of his goodness; and my lady, her mother, far away and never coming near her—if anybody was friendless and forlorn, it's Miss Lesley. Only me between her and her ruin, maybe! But I'll prevent it," said the woman, rising to her feet with a strange look of exaltation in her sunken eyes: "I'll guard her from Oliver Trent as I couldn't guard my own sister, poor lass! I'll see that she does not come to any harm, and if he means ill by her I'll shame him before all the world, even though I break more hearts than one by it."

And then she roused herself from her reverie, and went downstairs, where she knew that her presence was required in the tea-room. Scarcely had she entered it, when she made a short pause and gave a slightly perceptible start.

For there stood Ethel Kenyon, with Oliver Trent in attendance. She had not thought that he would come to the house ; a rumor had gone about that he had quarreled with Mr. Brooke ; yet there he was, smiling, bland, irreproachable as ever, with quite the look of one who had the right to be present. He was holding Ethel's fan and gloves as she drank a cup of tea, and seemed to be paying her every attention in his power. Ethel, in the daintiest of costumes, was laughing and talking to him as they stood together. *She* was quite unconscious of any reason for his possible absence. Mary Kingston gave them a keen glance as she went by, and decided in her own mind that there was more in the situation than as yet she had understood.

Oliver was playing a bold game. His marriage was fixed for the following Tuesday. From Mr. Brooke's attitude in general towards the Kenyons, he felt sure that Caspar would not place them in any painful or perplexing situation. He would not, for instance, refuse to welcome Oliver to his house again, if Oliver went in Ethel's company. Accordingly, the young man put his pride and his delicacy (if he had either—which is doubtful) in his pocket, and went with his affianced wife to Mr. Brooke's Saturday evening party.

"For I will see Lesley again," he said to himself, "and if I do not go to-night I may not have the opportunity. If she would relent, I would not mind throwing Ethel over—I could do it so easily now that Francis has disappeared. But I would give up Ethel's twenty thousand, if Lesley would go with me instead !"

Little did he guess that only on the previous night had he been recognized and remembered by that missing brother, whose tottering brain was inflamed almost to madness by a conviction of deliberate wrong ; or that this brother was even now upon his track, ready to demand the justice that he thought had been denied him, and to punish the man who had brought him to this evil pass ! Wild and mad as were the imaginings of Francis Trent's bewildered mind, they boded ill to his brother Oliver whenever the two should meet.

Meanwhile, Ethel's lover, with a white flower in his button-hole, occupied the whole evening in leaning idly against a wall, and feasting his eyes on the fair face and form—not of his betrothed, but—of Lesley Brooke.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## IN MR. BROOKE'S STUDY.

CASPAR BROOKE'S dingy drawing-room looked cheerful enough that night, filled by a crowd of men and women, and animated by the buzz of constant talk and movement. It was a distinguishing characteristic of his parties that they were composed more of men than of women ; and the guests were often men or women who had done something in the world, and were known for some special excellence in their work. Lesley generally enjoyed these gatherings very much. The visitors were shabby, unfashionable people sometimes : they had eccentricities of dress and manner ; but they were always interesting in Lesley's eyes. Literary men, professors, politicians, travelers, philanthropists, faddists—these were the folk that mostly frequented Caspar Brooke's parties. Neither artists nor musicians were largely represented : the flow of talk was rather political and literary than artistic ; and on the whole there were more elderly people than young ones. As a rule, Oliver Trent was not disposed to frequent these assemblies : he shrugged his shoulders at them and called them "slow," but on this occasion he was only too glad to find admittance. It was at least a good opportunity for watching Lesley, as she passed from one group to another, doing the duties of assistant-hostess with grace and tact, giving a smile to one, a word to another, entering into low-toned conversation, which brightened her eyes and flushed her fair cheek, with another. Oliver thought her perfection. Beside her stately proportions, Ethel seemed to him ridiculously tiny and insignificant, and her sparkling prettiness was altogether eclipsed by Lesley's calmer beauty. He was not in an amiable mood. He had steeled himself against the dictates of his own taste and conscience, to encounter Caspar Brooke's cold stare and freezing word of conventional welcome, because he longed so intensely for a last word with Lesley ; but he was now almost sorry that he had come.

Lesley seemed utterly indifferent to his presence. She certainly carried his flowers in her hand, but she did not glance his way. On the contrary, she anxiously watched the door from time to time, as if she awaited the coming of some one who was slow to make his appearance. Who could the person be for whom she looked? Oliver asked himself jealously. He had not the slightest suspicion that she was watching for Maurice Kenyon. And Maurice Kenyon did not come.

It was his absence that, as the evening wore on, made the color slip from Lesley's cheeks and robbed her eyes of their first brightness. A certain listlessness came over her. And Oliver, watching from his corner, exulted in his heart, for he thought to himself—

"It is for me she is looking sad; and if she will but yield her will to mine, I will win and wear her yet, in spite of all who would say me nay."

It was a veritable love-madness, such as had not come upon him since the days of his youth. He had had a fairly wide experience of love-making; but never had he been so completely mastered by his passion as he was now. The consideration that had once been so potent with him—love of ease, money, and position—seemed all to have vanished away. What mattered it that to abandon Ethel Kenyon at the last moment would mean disgrace and perhaps even beggary? He had no care left for thoughts like these. If Lesley would acknowledge her love for him, he was ready to throw all other considerations to the winds.

"Sing something, Lesley," her father said to her when the evening was well advanced. "You have your music here?"

Oh, yes, Lesley had her music here. But she glanced a little nervously in Oliver's direction. "I wonder if Ethel would accompany me," she said. She shrank nervously from the thought of Oliver's accompaniments.

But Oliver was too quick for her. He moved forward to the piano as soon as he saw Caspar Brooke's eye upon it. And with his hand on the key-board, he addressed himself suavely to Lesley.

"You are going to sing, I hope? May I not have the pleasure of accompanying you?"

Lesley could not say him nay, but she also could not help a glance, half of alarm, half of appeal, towards her

father. Mr. Brooke's face wore an expression which was not often seen upon it at a social gathering. It was distinctly stormy—there was a frown upon the brow, and an ominous setting of the lips which more than one person in the room remarked. "How savage Brooke looks!" one guest murmured into another's ear. "Isn't he friendly with Trent?" And the words were remembered in after days.

But nothing could be said or done to hinder Oliver from taking his place at the piano, for Lesley did not openly object, and her father could not interfere between her and his own guest. So Lesley sang, and did not sing so well as usual, for her heart failed her a little, partly through vexation and partly through disappointment at Maurice Kenyon's disappearance, but she gave pleasure to her hearers, in spite of what seemed to herself a comparative failure, and when she had finished her song, she was besieged by requests that she would sing once more.

"Sing 'Thine is my heart,'" Oliver's soft voice murmured in her ear.

"I have not that song here," said Lesley, quietly. She was not very much discomposed now, but she did not want to encourage his attention. She rose from the music-stool. "My music is downstairs," she said. "I must go and fetch it—I have a new song that Ethel has promised to play for me."

Oliver bit his lips and stood back as Lesley escaped by the door of the front drawing-room. Mr. Brooke's eye was upon him, and he could not therefore follow her; but he made his way into the library through the folding doors, and there a new mode of attack became visible to him. By the library door he gained the landing; and then he softly descended the stairs, which were now almost deserted, for the guests had crowded into the drawing-room, first to hear Lesley's song and then to listen to a recitation by Ethel Kenyon. But where had Lesley gone?

A subtle instinct told him that she had hidden herself for a moment—and told him also where to find her. The lights were burning low in her father's study, which had been set to rights a little, in order to serve as a room where people could lounge and talk if they wanted to escape the din of conversation in the larger rooms. He looked in, and at first thought it empty. But the movement of a curtain revealed some one's presence; and as his eyes became



accustomed to the dimmer light, he saw that it was Lesley. She was standing between the fireplace and curtained window, and her hand was on the mantelpiece.

She started when she saw him in the doorway. It was her start that betrayed her. He came forward and shut the door behind him—Lesley fancied that she heard the click of the key in the lock. She tried to carry matters with a high hand.

"I am afraid I cannot find my music here," she said, "so please do not shut the door, Mr. Trent. There is little enough light as it is."

She walked forward, but he had planted himself squarely between her and the door. She could not pass.

"Mr. Trent——" she began.

"Wait! don't speak," he said, in a voice so hoarse and stifled that she could hardly recognize it as his own. "I must have a word with you—forgive me—I won't detain you long——"

"Excuse me, I must go back to the drawing-room."

Lesley spoke civilly but coldly, though some sort of fear of him passed shiveringly through her frame.

"You shall not go yet: you shall listen to what I have to say."

"Mr. Trent!"

"Yes, it is all very well to exclaim! You know what I mean, and what I want. I had not time to speak the other night; but I will speak now. Lesley, I love you!"

"Mr. Trent, Ethel is upstairs. Have you forgotten her? Let me pass."

"I have not forgotten her: I remember her only too well. She is the burden, the incubus of my life. Oh, I know all that you can tell me about her: I know her beauty, her gifts, her virtues; but all that does not charm me. You, you and no other, are the woman that I love; and, beside you, Ethel is nothing to me at all."

"You might at least remember your duty to her," said Lesley, with severity. "You have won her heart, and you are about to vow to make her happy. I cannot understand how you can be so false to her."

"If I am false to her," said Oliver, pleadingly, "I am true to the dictates of my own heart. Hear me, Lesley—pity me! I have promised to marry a woman whom I do

not love. I acknowledge it frankly. I shall never make her happy—strive as I may, her nature will never assimilate with mine. She will go through life a disappointed woman ; while, if I set her free, she will find some man whom she loves and will be happy with him. You may as well confess that this is true. You may as well acknowledge that her nature is too light, too trivial to be rent asunder by any falsity of mine. Ethel will never break her heart ; but you might break yours, Lesley—and I—I also—have a heart to break.”

Lesley smiled scornfully. “Yours will not break very easily,” she said, “and I can answer for mine.”

“You are strong,” he said, using the formula by which men know how to soften women’s hearts, “stronger than I am. Be merciful, Lesley ! I am very weak, I know ; but weakness means suffering. Can you not pity me, when you think that my weakness and my suffering come from love of you ?”

“I am very sorry, Mr. Trent, but I really cannot help it. It is your own fault—not mine,” said Lesley, a little hotly. “I never thought of such a thing.”

“No, you were as innocent and as good as you always are,” he broke in, “and you did not know what you were doing when you led me on with those sweet looks and sweet words of yours. I can believe that. But you did the mischief, Lesley, without meaning it ; and you must not refuse to make amends. You made me think you loved me.”

“Oh, no, no,” said Lesley, her face aflame with outraged modesty. “I never made you think so ! You were mistaken—that is all !”

“You made me think you loved me,” Oliver repeated, doggedly, “and you owe me amends. To say the very least, you have given me great pain : you have made me the most miserable of men, and wrecked all chance of happiness between Ethel and myself—have you no heart that you can refuse to repair a little of the harm that you have done ? You are a cruel woman—I could almost say a wicked woman : hard, false, and cowardly ; and I wish my words could blight your life as your coquetry has blighted mine.”

Lesley trembled. No woman could listen to such words unmoved, when her armor of incredulity fell from her as Lesley’s armor had fallen. Hitherto she had felt a scorn-

ful disbelief in the reality of Oliver's love for her. But now that disbelief had gone. There was a ring of passionate feeling in Oliver's tones which could not be simulated. The coldness, the artificiality of the man had disappeared : his passion for Lesley had taken possession of him, and stirred his nature to the very depths.

"Listen, Lesley," he said, in a low, strained voice, which shook and vibrated with the intensity of his emotion, "don't let me feel this. Don't let me feel that you have merely played with me, and are ready to cast me off like an old shoe when you are tired. Other women do that sort of thing ; but not you, my darling !—not you—don't let me think it of you. Forgive me the harsh things I said, and help me—help me—to forget them."

He had grasped the back of a chair with both hands, and was kneeling with one knee on the seat ? he now stretched out his hands to her, and came forward as if to take her in his arms. But Lesley drew back.

"I am very sorry," she said, "but I cannot help it. I did not mean to be unkind."

"If you are really sorry for me," he said, still in the deep-shaken voice which moved her to so uneasy a sense of pain and wrong-doing, "you will do all you can for me. You will help me to begin a new life. I love you so much that I am sure I could teach you to love me. I am certain of it, Lesley—dearest—let me try !"

Did she falter for a moment ? There flashed over her the remembrance of Maurice's anger, of his continued absence, of the probability that he would never come back to her ; and the dream of a tender love that could envelop the rest of her lonely life assailed her like a temptation. She hesitated, and in that moment's pause Oliver drew nearer to her side.

"Kiss me, Lesley !" he whispered, and his head bent over hers, his lips almost touched her own.

Then came the reaction—the awakening.

"Oh, no, no ! Do not touch me. Do not come near me. I do not love you. And if I did"—said Lesley, almost violently—"if I loved you more than all the world, do you think that I would betray Ethel, my friend ? that I would be so false to her—and to myself ?"

"Then you do love me ?" he murmured, undisturbed by her vehemence, which he did not think boded ill for his chances, after all.

"No, I do not."

"You are mistaken. Kiss me once, Lesley, and you will know. You will feel your love then."

"You insult me, Mr. Trent. Love you? Come one step nearer and I shall hate you. Oh!" she said, recoiling, as a gleam from the lamp revealed to her the wild expression in his eyes, the tension of his white lips and nostrils, the strange transformation in those usually impassive features which revealed the brutal nature below the polished surface of the man, "I hate you now!"

She was close to the wall, and her head came in sudden contact with the old-fashioned bell-rope. She seized it firmly.

"Open the door," she said, "or I shall ring this bell and send for my father. He will know what to do."

Oliver gazed at her for a minute or two, then, with a smothered oath upon his lips, he turned slowly to the door and opened it. Before leaving the room, however, he said, in a voice half-stifled by impotent passion—

"Is this really your last word?"

"The last I shall ever speak to you," said Lesley, resolutely.

Then he went out, seizing his hat as he passed through the hall and made his way into the street. He did not notice, as he retired, that a woman's figure was only half-concealed behind the curtains that screened a door in the study, and that his interview with Lesley must therefore have had an unseen auditor. He forgot that Ethel and Rosalind waited for him above. He was mad with rage; deaf to all voices saving those of passion: blind to all sights save the visions that floated maddeningly before his eyes.

Mad, blind, deaf to reason as he was, he was obliged to come back to earth and its realities before very long. For he was stopped in the streets by rough hands: a hoarse, passionate voice uttered threats and curses in his ear; and he found himself face to face with his long-vanished and half-forgotten brother, Francis Trent.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## BROTHERS.

"WHAT do you want with me?" said Oliver trying to shake off the rude grasp.

"I want you—you," gasped the man. He was evidently much excited, and his breath came in hard, quick pants. "Have you forgotten your own brother?"

The two paused for an instant under a gas lamp. Oliver looked into Francis Trent's drawn, livid face—into the wild, bloodshot eyes, and for an instant recoiled. It struck him that the face was that of a madman. But it was, nevertheless, the face of his brother, and after that momentary pause he recovered himself and laughed slightly.

"Forgotten you? I'm not very likely to forget you, my boy. Well, what do you want?"

"I want that two thousand pounds."

His hand still clutched Oliver's arm, and the grasp was becoming unpleasant.

"Can you not take your hand off my arm?" said the younger man, coolly. "I'm not going to run away. Apropos, what have you been doing with yourself all these weeks! I thought you had given us the slip altogether."

"I want my money," said Francis, doggedly.

Oliver looked at him curiously. What did this persistence mean? What money was he thinking about?

"Your money?" he repeated.

"Yes, my money—the money you ought to have given me by this time—where is it?"

"You mean the sum I promised you on my wedding-day?"

Francis nodded, with a rather confused look upon his face.

"My wedding-day has not occurred yet," said Oliver, lightly. "Upon my word, I doubt whether it ever will occur. Don't alarm yourself, Francis. I shall get the money for you before long—I've not forgotten it."

"I want it now. Two thousand pounds," said Francis, thickly.

"Are you drunk, man! Do you think I carry two thousand pounds about with me in my pocket? Go home—I'll see you again when you are sober."

"I have touched nothing but water to-day," said his brother. "I swear it—so help me, God! I know what I'm about. And I know *you*. I know you for the vilest cheat and trickster that ever walked the earth. I've been in hospital—I don't know how long. I know that you would cheat me if you could. You were to pay me within six months—and it's over six months now."

"I tell you I'm not married. I was to pay you on my wedding-day."

"You were to pay me within six months. Have you opened a bank account for me and paid in the two thousand pounds?"

"Are you mad, Francis?"

"Mad?—I may well be mad after all you have made me suffer. I tell you I want money—money—money—I want two thousand pounds."

His voice rose almost to a shriek, and the sound reverberated along the quiet street with startling effect. Oliver shrank into himself a little, and gave a hurried glance around him. They were still in Upper Woburn Place, and he was afraid that the noise should excite remark. It was plain to him that Francis was either drunk or out of his mind, and he therefore concentrated his attention on getting quietly away from him, or leading him to some more secluded spot.

"Look here," he said, in a conciliatory tone. "You shall have your money if you'll be quiet and come away with me. Come to my house and I'll explain things to you. You've not seen Rosalind for a long time, have you? Come in and talk things over."

"Oh, you want to trap me, do you?" said Francis, sullenly. "No, I'll not come to your house. Go in and fetch the money out to me, or I'll make you repent it."

Oliver was almost at his wit's end.

"All right," he said, soothingly. "I will fetch it. I can give you a cheque, you know. But don't you want a little loose change to go on with? Take these."

He held out a handful of gold and silver. Francis looked at it with covetous eyes for a minute or two, then thrust

his brother's hand aside with a jerk which almost sent the coins into the road.

"I want justice, not charity," he said. "I want the money you promised me."

Oliver shrugged his shoulders, and slowly returned the money to his pocket.

"I am more than ever convinced that you are either mad or drunk, my boy," he said. "You should never refuse ten pounds when you can get it, and it's not a thing that I should fancy you have often done before. However, as you choose."

He walked onward, and Francis walked, heavily and unsteadily, at his side, muttering to himself as he went. Oliver glanced curiously at him from time to time.

"I wonder what *has* happened to him," he said to himself. "It's not safe to question, but I *should* like to know. Is it drink? or is it brain disease? One thing or the other it must be. He does not look as if he would live to spend the two thousand pounds—if ever he gets it. I wonder if I could contrive to stave off the payment——"

And then he fell into a gloomy calculation of ways and means, possibilities and chances, which lasted until the house in Russell Square was reached. Here the brothers paused, and Oliver looked keenly into his companion's face, noting that a somewhat remarkable change had passed over it. Instead of being flushed and swollen, as if from drinking, it had become very pale. His eyes seemed on the point of closing, and he wavered unsteadily in his walk. Oliver had to put out his hand to save him from falling, and to help him to the steps, where he collapsed into a sitting posture, with his head against the railings. He seemed to be stupefied, if not asleep.

"Dead drunk," said Oliver to himself. "The danger's over for to-night, at any rate. Now, what shall I do with him? I can't get him into the house and lock him into a room—that would make talk. I think I had better leave him to the tender mercies of the next policeman; if he gets run in for being drunk and incapable, so much the better for me."

He took out his latch key and let himself into the house, closing the door softly behind him, so as not to awaken the half-sleeping wretch upon the steps. Then he ascended the stairs—still softly, as if he thought that he was not

yet out of danger of awaking him—and locked himself into his own room. Then he drew a long breath, and stood motionless for a moment, with bent brows and downcast eyes. "There will be no end to this," he said to himself, "until Francis is shipped off to America or landed safely in a madhouse. One seems to me about as likely as another. I wonder whether he was drunk to-night, or insane? Drunk, I think: insanity"—with a sinister smile—"would be too great a stroke of luck for me!"

But it was perfectly true, as Francis had said, that no drop of intoxicating liquor had passed his lips that day. He was suffering from brain disease, as Oliver had half suspected, although not to such an extent that he could actually be called insane. A certain form of mania was gradually taking possession of his mind. He was convinced that he had been robbed by his brother of much that was his due; and that Oliver was even now withholding money that was his. This fancy had its foundation in fact, for Oliver had wronged him more than once, and was ready to wrong him again should a suitable opportunity occur; but the notion that at present occupied his mind, respecting the payment of the two thousand pounds, was largely a figment of his disordered brain. Oliver had certainly questioned within himself whether he should be called upon to pay this sum, and as Francis seemed to have completely disappeared, he began to think that he might evade his promise to do so; but he had not as yet sought to free himself from the necessity of paying it. Francis' own words and demeanor suggested this idea for the first time to his mind. Was it possible, he asked himself, to prove that Francis was insane—clap him into a lunatic asylum—get rid of him forever without hush-money? True, there was his wife, Mary, to be silenced; but she had no influence and no friends. "Power is always in the hands of those who have most money," Oliver said to himself, as he reviewed the situation, after leaving Francis on the door step. "I have more money than Francis, certainly: I ought to be able to control his fate a little—and my own."

But Oliver, astute as he thought himself, was occasionally mistaken in his conclusions. Francis Trent, as we have said, was not intoxicated; and when he had dozed quietly for a few moments on the door-step, he came some-



what to himself, as he usually did after these fits of frenzy. He felt dazed and bewildered, but he was no longer furious. He could not remember very well what he had said to Oliver, or what Oliver had said to him. But he knew where he was, and that in this region—between Russell Square and St. Pancras Church—he should find his truest friends and perhaps also his bitterest foes.

He roused himself, stretched his cramped limbs, and turned back to wander towards Upper Woburn Place, hardly knowing, however, why he bent his steps in that direction. Instinct, not memory or reflection, guided him, and when he halted, he leaned against the railings of the house from which he had seen Oliver come forth, without realizing for one moment that it was the house in which his faithful and half-forgotten Mary was to be found.

The door opened, as he waited, and some of the guests came out. Two or three carriages drove up: there was a call for a hansom, a whistle, and an answering shout. Francis Trent watched the proceedings with a sort of stupid attention. They reminded him of the previous night when he had seen Ethel Kenyon coming out of the theatre after her farewell performance. But on that occasion he had passed unnoticed and unrecognized. This was not now to be the case.

Suddenly a woman on the threshold of Mr. Brooke's house caught sight of the weary, shabby figure leaning against the railings. Francis heard a little gasp, a little cry, and felt a hand upon his own. "Francis! is it you? have you really come back?" It was Mary Kingston who looked him in the face.

He returned the gaze with lack-lustre, unseeing eyes. When the fever-fit of rage left him, he was still subject to odd lapses of memory. One of these had assailed him now. He did not recognize his wife in the very least.

"I—I don't know you," he said. "Go away, woman. I'm not doing any harm."

There is nothing so piteous as the absence of recognition of the patient's best friends in cases of brain-disease. Francis Trent's condition sent a stab of pain to Mary's innermost heart. She forgot where she was—she forgot her duties as doorkeeper; she remembered only that she loved this man, and that he had forgotten her. She cried aloud—

"Francis, I am your wife."

"I have no wife," said the distraught man, looking listlessly beyond her. "I am here to see Oliver—he is to give me some money."

"Don't you remember Mary, Francis? Look at me—look at me."

"Mary?" he said, doubtfully. "Oh, yes, I remember Mary. But you are not Mary, are you?"

"Yes, indeed I am. Where have you been all this time? Oh, my poor dear, you can't tell me! You are ill, Francis. Let me take care of you. Can you tell me where you live?"

But he could not reply. His head drooped upon his breast: he looked as if he neither saw nor heard. What was she to do?

Of one thing Mary was certain. Now that she had found her husband, she was not going to lose sight of him again.

She would go with him whithersoever he went, unless he repelled her by force. She gave one regretful thought to her young mistress, and to a certain project which she had determined to put into effect that night, and then she thought of the Brookes no more. She must leave them, and follow her husband's fortunes. There was no other way for her.

Fortunately she had money in her pocket. She had also thrown a shawl across her arm before she came to the door. The shawl belonged to Miss Brooke, and had been offered to one of the guests as a loan; but Mary had forgotten all about the guests, and appropriated the shawl, with the cool resolution which characterized her in cases of emergency. Necessity—especially the necessity entailed by love—knows no law. At that moment she knew no law but that of her repressed and stunted, but always abiding, affection for the husband who had burdened her life for many weary years with toil and anxiety and care. For him she would do anything—throw up all friendships, sacrifice her future, her character, and, if need be, her life.

She wrapped the shawl round her head, and put her arm through her husband's, without once looking back.

"Come, Francis," she said, quietly, "show me where you live now. We will go home."

She led him unresistingly away. For a little while he walked as if in a dream; but by and by his movements became more assured, and he turned so decidedly in one

direction that she saw he knew his way and was pursuing it. She said nothing, but kept close to his side, with her hand resting lightly on his arm. She was not mistaken in her expectations. Francis went straight to the wretched lodging in which he had slept for the past few nights, and Mary at once assumed the management of his affairs.

She was rewarded—as she thought, poor soul!—for her efforts. When she had lighted a fire and a candle, and prepared some sort of frugal meal for the man she loved, he lifted up his face and looked at her with a gleam of returning memory and intelligence in his haggard eyes.

“Mary,” he said, in a bewildered tone, “Mary—my wife? How did you come here, Mary? How did you find me out?”

“Are you glad to see me, dear?” said Mary.

“Yes—yes, I am. Everything will be right now. You’ll manage things for me.”

It was an acknowledgment of the power of her affection which more than recompensed her for the trouble of the last few months.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## MRS. TRENT'S STORY.

"I NEVER heard of such an extraordinary thing," said Lesley.

"Then that shows how little you know of the world," said Doctor Sophy, amicably. "I've heard of a hundred cases of the kind."

"Well, there are some elements of oddity in this case," remarked Caspar Brooke, striking in with unexpected readiness to defend his daughter's views. "Kingston was not a giddy young girl, who would go off with any man who made love to her. Indeed, I can't quite fancy any man making love to her at all. She was remarkably plain, poor woman."

"She had beautiful eyes," said Lesley. "And she was so nice and quiet and kind. And I really thought that she was—fond of me." She paused before she uttered the last three words, being a little afraid that they would be thought sentimental. And indeed Miss Brooke did give a contemptuous snort, but Caspar smiled kindly, and patted his daughter's hand.

"Don't take it to heart," he said. "'Fondness' is a very indeterminate term, and one that you must not scrutinize too closely. This little black beast, for instance"—caressing, as he spoke, the head of the ebony-hued cat which sat upon the arm of his chair—"which I picked up half-starving in the street when it was a kitten, is fond of me because I feed it: but suppose that I were too poor to give it milk and chicken-bones, do you think it would retain any affection for me? A sublimated cupboard-love is all that we can expect now-a-days from cats—and servants."

"When you can write as you do about love," said Lesley, who was coming to know her father well enough to tease him now and then, "I wonder that you dare venture to express yourself in this cold-blooded way in our hearing!"

"Ah, but, my dear, I was not talking about love," said Caspar, lightly. "I was talking about 'fondness,' which is a very different matter. You did not say that your maid, Kingston, *loved* you—I suppose she was hardly likely to go that length—you said that she was fond of you. Very probably. But fondness has its limits."

Lesley smiled in reply, and did not utter the thought that occurred to her. What she really believed was that Kingston was not only "fond" of her, after the instinctive fashion of a dumb creature that one feeds, but loved her, as one woman loves another. Although her democratic feelings came to her through her father's teaching, or by inheritance from him, she did not quite like to say this to him: he might think it foolish to believe that a servant whom she had not known for very many weeks actually loved her; and yet she had the conviction that Kingston's attachment was deeper and more sincere than that of many a woman who claimed to be her friend. And she was both grieved and puzzled by Kingston's disappearance.

For this was on Monday morning, and the woman had not come back to Mr. Brooke's. Great had been the astonishment of every one in the house when it was found that the quiet, well-spoken, well-behaved Mary Kingston, who had hitherto proved herself so trustworthy and so conscientious, had gone away—disappeared utterly and entirely, without leaving a word of explanation behind. She had last been seen on the pavement, shortly before midnight, assisting a lady to get into a hansom. Nobody had seen her re-enter the house. It seemed as if she had been spirited away. She had gone without a bonnet or shawl, in her plain black dress and white cap and apron, as if she meant to return in a minute or two, and she had not appeared again. The shawl that she had taken with her was not missed, for Miss Brooke continued for some time under the impression that it had been lent to one of the visitors.

The conversation recorded above took place at Mr. Brooke's luncheon-table. It was not often that he was present at this meal, but on this occasion he had joined his sister and daughter, and questioned then with considerable interest about Kingston. After lunch, he put his hand gently on Lesley's arm, just as she was leaving the dining-room, and said, in a tone where sympathy was veiled with banter—

"Never mind, my dear. We will get you another maid, who will be *less* fond of you, and then perhaps she will stay."

"I don't want another maid, thank you, papa. And, indeed, I do think Kingston was fond of me," said Lesley earnestly.

Mr. Brooke shrugged his shoulders. "Verily," he said, "the credulity of some women——"

"But it isn't credulity," said Lesley, with something between a smile and a sigh, "it is faith. And I can't altogether disbelieve in poor Kingston—even now."

Mr. Brooke shook his head, but made no rejoinder. Privately he thought Lesley foolishly mistaken, but believed that time would do its usual office in correcting the mistakes of the young.

His own incredulity received a considerable shock somewhat later in the day. About four o'clock a knock came to his study, and the knock was followed by the appearance of the scur-visaged Sarah.

"If you please, sir, there's that woman herself wants to see you."

"What woman, Sarah?" said Caspar, carelessly. He was writing and smoking, and did not look up from his work.

"The woman, Kingston, that ran away," said Sarah, indignantly. "I nearly shut the door in her face, sir, I did."

"That wouldn't have been legal," said Mr. Brooke. "Why doesn't she see Miss Brooke or Miss Lesley? I am busy."

"I expect she thinks she can get round you more easy," said Sarah, who was a very old servant, and occasionally took liberties with her master and mistress.

"She won't do that, Sarah," said Caspar, laughing a little in spite of himself. "Show her in."

He laid down his pen and his pipe with a rather weary air. Really, he was becoming involved in no end of domestic worries, and with few compensations for his trouble! Such was his silent thought. Lesley would shortly leave him: Alice had refused to come back to his house. Well, it would be but for a short time. He had almost made up his mind that when Lesley was gone he would give up a house altogether, establish his sister in a flat, throw journalism

to the winds, and go abroad. The life that he had led so long, the life of London offices and streets, of the study and the committee-room, had become distasteful to him. As he thrust away from him the manuscript at which he had been busy, his lips were, half unconsciously, murmuring a very well-worn quotation—

“For I will see before I die,  
The palms and temples of the South.”

And from this passing day-dream he was roused by the entrance of a woman whom he knew only as his daughter's maid.

He was struck at once by some indefinable change that had passed over her since he had seen her last. He had noticed her, as he noticed everybody that came within his ken; and he had remarked the mechanical precision of her demeanor, the dull sadness of her lifeless eyes. There was a light in her face now, a tremulous quiver of her lips, a slight color in her thin cheeks. She looked like a creature who could feel and think: not an automaton, worked by ingenious machinery.

He noted the change, but did not estimate it at its true worth. He thought she was simply excited by the consciousness of her misdemeanor, and by the prospect of an interview with him. He put on his most magisterial manner as he spoke to her.

“Well, Kingston,” he said, “I hope you have come to explain the cause of the great inconvenience you have brought upon Miss Brooke and my daughter.”

“That is exactly what I have come to do, sir,” said Kingston, looking him full in the face, and speaking in clear, decided tones, such as he had never heard from her before. She generally spoke in a muffled sort of way, as though she did not care to exert herself—as though she did not want her true voice to be heard.

“Sit down,” said Mr. Brooke, more kindly. He had the true gentleman's instinct; he could not bear to see a woman stand while he was seated, although she was only his daughter's maid, and—presumably—a culprit awaiting condemnation. “Now tell me all about it.”

“Thank you, sir, I'd prefer to stand,” said Kingston, quietly. “At any rate, until I've told you one or two

things about myself. To begin with: my name was Kingston before my marriage, but it's not Kingston now."

"Do you mean that you have got married since Saturday?" asked Caspar, quietly.

The woman uttered a short, gasping sort of laugh. "Since Saturday? Oh, no, sir. I've been married for the last six years, or more. I am Francis Trent's wife—Francis the brother of Mr. Oliver Trent, who was here last Saturday night."

And then, overcome with her confession, or with the look of mute astonishment—which he could not repress—on Caspar Brooke's countenance, she dropped into the chair that he had offered her, covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud. It took her hearer some seconds before he could adjust his mind to this new revelation.

"Do you mean," he said at last, "that brother of Mr. Trent's"—he had nearly said "of Mrs. Romaine's"—"who—who——" He paused, feeling unable to put into words the question that was in his mind.

"That got into trouble some years ago, you mean," said Mrs. Trent, lifting her face from her hands, and trying to control her trembling voice. "Yes, I mean him. I know all about the story. He got into trouble, and he's gone from bad to worse ever since. I've done my best for him, but it doesn't seem as if I could do much more now."

"Why?"

"He's been ill—I think he's had an accident—but I don't rightly know what's been the matter with him. Mr. Brooke, sir, I hope you'll believe me in what I say. When I came here first I didn't know that you were friends with his sister and his brother, or I wouldn't have come near the place. And when I found it out I'd got fond of Miss Lesley, and thought it would be no harm to stay."

"But what—what on earth—made you take a situation as ladies'-maid at all?" cried Caspar, pulling his beard in his perplexity, as he listened to her story.

"I wanted to earn money. *He* could not work—and I could not bear to see him want."

"*Could* not work? Was it not a matter of the will? He could have worked if he had wished to work," said Mr. Brooke, rather sternly. "That Francis Trent should let his wife go out as——"

"Oh, well, it was work I was used to," said Francis Trent's wife, patiently. "I'd been in service when I was



a girl, and knew something about it. And it was honest work. There's plenty of ways of earning money which are worse than being a servant in your house, and to Miss Lesley, too."

Lesley's words came back to Caspar's mind. She had had "faith" in Kingston's attachment, and her faith seemed now to be justified. Women's instincts, as Caspar acknowledged to himself, are in some ways certainly juster than those of men.

"Is he not strong? Is there no sort of work that he can do?" he demanded, with asperity. "If you had come to me at the beginning and told me who you were, I might have found something for him. It is not right that his wife should be waiting upon my daughter. Tell me what he can do."

"I don't think he can do much now," was Mary Trent's answer. "He's very much broken down. I daresay you wouldn't know him if you saw him. I don't think he *could* do a day's work, so there's all the more reason that I should work for both."

She spoke truly enough as regarded the present; but, by a suppression of the truth which was almost heroic she concealed the fact that for many years Francis had been able but unwilling to work. Now, certainly, he was incapacitated, and she spoke as if he had been an invalid for years. Thus Caspar Brooke understood her, and his next words were uttered in a gentler tone.

"I am very sorry that you should have been brought into these straits, Mrs. Trent. Will you give me your address, and let me think over the matter? Mrs. Romaine or Mr. Oliver Trent——"

"I'd rather not have anything to do with them," said Mrs. Trent, quietly, but with an involuntary lifting of her head. "Mrs. Romaine knows I am his wife, but she won't speak to me or see me." Caspar moved uneasily in his chair. This account of Rosalind's behavior did not coincide with his own idea of her softness and gentleness. "And Oliver Trent is the man who has brought more misery on me than any other man in the world."

"But if I promise—as I will do—not to give your address to Mrs. Romaine or Mr. Trent, will you not let me know where you live?" said Caspar, with the gentle intonation that had often won him his way in spite of greater obstacles than poor Mary Trent's obstinate will.

She gave him her address, after a little hesitation. It was in a Whitechapel slum. Then, seeing in his face that he would have liked to ask more questions, she went on hurriedly—

"But I have not come here to take up your time. I only wanted to explain to you why I left your house on Saturday—which I'm very sorry to have been obliged to do. And one other thing—but I'll tell you that afterwards."

"Well? Why did you go on Saturday, Mrs. Trent?" said Mr. Brooke, more curious than he would have liked to allow. But she did not reply as directly to his question as he wanted her to do.

"I was only a poor girl when Francis married me," she said, "but I loved him as true as any one could have loved, and I would have worked my fingers to the bone for him. And he was good to me, in his way. He got to depend upon me and trust to me; and I used to feel—especially when he'd had a little more than he ought to have—as if he was more of a child to me than a husband. It was to provide for him that I came here. And then—one day when I'd been here a little while—I went to his lodgings to give him some money I'd been saving up for him—and I found him gone—gone—without a word—without a message—disappeared, so to speak, and me left behind to be miserable."

Caspar ejaculated "Scoundrel!" behind his hand, but Mrs. Trent heard and caught up the word.

"No, you're wrong, sir, he was no scoundrel," she said calmly. "He'd met with an accident and been taken to an hospital. He was there for weeks and weeks, not able to give an account of himself, or, as far as I can make out, even to give his name. He came out last week, and made his way, by sort of instinct, to your house, where he knew I was living. I came out on the steps and saw him there—my husband that I'd given up for lost. I ran up to him—you'd have done the same in my place—and went with him without thinking of anybody else."

"I see. But why did you not leave a word of explanation behind."

"I daren't quit hold of him for a moment, sir. He was so dazed and stupid, he didn't even know me at the first. That was why I say it was instinct, not knowledge, that guided him to the place. If I had left him to speak to

any one in the house, he might have gone off, and I never seen him again. That was why I felt obliged to go, sir, and am very sorry for the inconvenience I know I must have caused."

Caspar nodded gravely. "I see," he said. "Of course it *was* inconvenient, and we were anxious—there's no denying that. But I can see the matter from your point of view. Would you like to see Miss Lesley and explain it to her?"

"I'd rather leave it in your hands, sir," said Mary Trent. "Because there's one thing more I've got to mention before I go." And Miss Lesley may not thank me for mentioning it, although I do it to save her—poor lamb—and to save you too, sir, from a great trouble and sorrow and disgrace that hangs over you all just now."

Caspar flushed. "Disgrace?" he said, almost angrily.

And Mrs. Trent looked at him full in the face and nodded gravely, as she answered—

"Yes, sir, disgrace."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## "A FAIRLY GOOD REASON."

CASPAR BROOKE's attitude stiffened. His features and limbs became suddenly rigid.

"I must confess, Mrs. Trent," he said, "that I am unable to conceive the possibility of *disgrace* hanging over me or mine."

"That is because you are a man, and therefore blind to what goes on around you," said Mary Trent, with sudden bitterness; "and I am a woman, and can use my eyes and ears. There, I'd better tell you my tale at once, and you can make what you like of it. Miss Lesley——"

"If you have anything to say about Miss Lesley, it had better be said in her hearing," returned Caspar, in hot displeasure. He rose and laid his hand upon the bell. "I want no tales about her behind her back."

"For mercy's sake, sir, stop," said the woman, eagerly. "It is only to spare her that I ask it! It isn't that she is to blame—no, no, I don't mean that; but she is in more danger than she knows."

Caspar's hand fell from the bell rope. His face had turned a trifle pale, and his brows looked very stern.

"Tell me exactly what you mean. I do not wish to listen to anything that Miss Lesley has not intended me to hear. I have perfect faith in her."

"Faith in her! She's one of the sweetest and truest-hearted ladies I ever came across," said Mary Trent, indignantly; "but she may be on the brink of a precipice without knowing it. Sir, what I mean is this. Mr. Oliver Trent is in love with Miss Lesley, and is doing his best to get her to run off with him. Yes, I know what you want to say—that she would never do such a thing—but one cannot always say what a girl will do under pressure; and, believe me or not as you please, Oliver Trent is ready to throw over Miss Kenyon at any moment for the sake of your daughter, Mr. Brooke."

"Do you know what you are saying?" thundered Caspar, now white to the lips. "Do you know what an aspersion you are casting on my daughter's character? Are you aware that Miss Kenyon's marriage with Mr. Trent is to take place to-morrow morning? Your remarks are perfectly unjustifiable—unless you are in ignorance of the facts of the case."

"I know all, and yet I warn you," said Mrs. Trent, perfectly unmoved by this burst of anger. "I tell you what I have seen and heard for myself. And I know Oliver Trent only too well. It was Oliver Trent who betrayed my only sister, and brought her to a miserable death. She was a good girl until she met him. He ruined her, and he had no scruples. He will have more outward respect to Miss Lesley and Miss Kenyon, but he is no more scrupulous about using his power, when he has any, than he was then."

"After making this accusation you must not be surprised if I ask what grounds you have for it," said Mr. Brooke.

He was calm enough to all appearance now, but even Mrs. Trent, not very observant by nature, could tell that he was very much disturbed. For answer, she proceeded to describe the scene that had taken place in the very room in which they now stood, on the preceding Saturday night.

"I saw him follow Miss Lesley into this room," she explained. "And I'd seen enough to make me fearful of what he was going to do or say. You know there are folding-doors between this room and the next—screened by curtains. The doors had been partly opened, and I slipped into the space between them. I was covered by the curtain, and I could not hear all that was said, because I had sounds from the other room in my ears as well; but I heard a great deal, and I made up my mind to tell you there and then. If I had not seen my husband that night you would have heard my story before you slept."

Caspar Brooke's next question took her by surprise. He swung round on one heel, so that his back was almost turned to her, and flung the words over his shoulder with savage bitterness.

"What business had you to listen to my daughter's conversation with her friends?"

This was a distinctly ungrateful speech, and Mrs. Trent felt it so. But she replied, quietly—

"Miss Lesley's been kinder to me than any one I ever knew. And I had suffered a good deal from Oliver Trent's wicked falseness. He is my brother-in-law, as the law puts it, and I don't want to have any quarrel with him : but he shall do no more harm than I can help."

By the time she had finished her speech Caspar had recovered himself a little.

"You are quite right," he said, "and you have done me a service for which I thank you. I don't for a moment suppose that my daughter is not capable of taking care of herself. But other people are interested beside Lesley. Miss Kenyon's brother is one of my closest friends, and I should be very treacherous if I allowed her to marry this man, Oliver Trent, after all that I have heard about him to-night—if it be true. I don't want to throw doubt on your testimony, Mrs. Trent, but I suppose I must have some further proof."

"Miss Lesley could tell you——"

"I shall not ask Miss Lesley, unless I am obliged. Did you not yourself beg me to spare her? This other story of his heartless conduct to your sister is quite enough to damn him in every right-minded woman's eyes. I shall speak to him myself—I will have the truth from his own lips if I have to wring it out by main force," said Caspar speaking more to himself than to Mary Trent, and quite unaware how truculent an appearance he presented at that moment to that quiet woman's eyes.

She smiled stealthily to herself. She had a great faith in Caspar Brooke's powers for good or evil. To have him upon her side made her support with equanimity the thought that she and Francis might suffer if Oliver did not marry a rich wife. *He* would see that they did not want. And she should behold the darling wish of her heart gratified at last. For had she not ardently desired, ever since the day of Alice's betrayal and Alice's death, to see that false betrayer punished? Caspar Brooke would punish him, and she should be the instrument through which his punishment had come about.

"I should like to thrash the scoundrel within an inch of his life," said Mr. Brooke.

"There is very little time before the wedding, if you mean to do anything before then," said Mrs. Trent, softly.

Caspar started. "Yes, that is true. I must see him to-night. H'm"—he stopped short, oppressed by the dif-

ficulties of the situation. Had he not better speak to Maurice Kenyon at once? But, as he recollected, Maurice had gone out of town, and would not be back until half an hour or so before the hour fixed for his sister's wedding. The ceremony was to be performed at an unusually early hour—ten o'clock in the morning—for divers reasons: one being that Ethel wanted to begin her journey to Paris in very good time. She had never been anxious for a fashionable wedding, and had decided to have no formal wedding breakfast, and there was no reason for delaying the proceedings until a later hour. But, as Mr. Brooke reflected, unless he went to Ethel Kenyon herself there was little time in which to take action. Indeed, it seemed to him for a moment almost better to let the past sink into oblivion, and to hope that Oliver would be kind and faithful to the beautiful and gifted girl who was, apparently, the choice of his heart.

But it was not to Mrs. Trent's interest that this mood should last. "Poor Miss Kenyon!" she said, in quietly regretful tones. "I'm sorry for her, poor young lady. No mother or father to look after her, and no friend even who dares to tell her the truth!"

The words stung Caspar. He thought of his own daughter Lesley, placed in Ethel's position, and he felt that he could not let Ethel go unwarned. And yet—could he believe Oliver Trent to be such a scoundrel on the mere strength of this woman's story! It might be all a baseless slander, fabricated for the sake of obtaining money. And there was so little time before poor Ethel's wedding!

While he hesitated, Mary Trent saw her opportunity, and seized it.

"If you want to see Oliver Trent," she said, "he is coming to our lodgings this very night. I have been to Mrs. Romaine's house to ask him to come to my husband who wants a few words with him. If you'll undertake to come there, I'll let you see what sort of a man Mr. Oliver Trent is, and then you can judge for yourself whether or no he is a fit husband for Miss Kenyon, or a fit lover for Miss Lesley Brooke."

Caspar raised his hand hastily as if to entreat silence. "Tell me where you live," he said shortly, "and the hour when he will be there."

"Half-past nine o'clock this evening, sir. The place—oh, you know the place well enough: it is in Whitechapel."

She gave him the address. He cast a keen, sharp glance at her face as he took it down. "Not a pleasant neighborhood," he said gravely. "May I ask why you have taken a room in that locality?"

She shook her head. "I did not take it," she said. "My husband took it before I found him, and I was obliged to stay. Francis is ill—I cannot get him away."

"Can I do anything to help——" Caspar was beginning but she interrupted him with almost surprising vehemence.

"Oh, no, no. I would not take anything from you. I did not come for that. I came to see if I could save Miss Lesley and Miss Kenyon from misery, not to beg—either for myself or him."

The earnestness of her tone took from Mr. Brooke a certain uneasy suspicion which had begun to steal over him: a suspicion that she was using him as a tool for her own ends, that her real motives had been concealed from him. Even when she had gone—and she went without making any attempt to see Lesley or Miss Brooke—he could not rid himself altogether of this suggestion; for with her sad voice no longer echoing in his ears, with her deep-set eyes looking no longer into his face, he found it easier to doubt and to suspect than to place implicit faith in the story that she had told him.

Lesley had heard of Kingston's reappearance, and was very much surprised to find that she was not called upon to interview her runaway attendant. Still more was she surprised when at last she heard the front door shut, and learned from Sarah that the woman had gone without a word. So much amazed was she, that shortly before dinner she stole into her father's study and attempted to cross-examine him, though with small result.

"Father, Sarah says that Kingston has been to see you."

"Yes, she has," said Caspar, briefly. He was writing away as if for dear life, with his left hand grasping his beard, and his pipe lying unfilled upon the table—two signs of dire haste, as Lesley had by this time learned to know. She remained silent, therefore, feeling herself an intruder.

"What do you want to know, my dear?" said her father at last, in a quiet, business-like tone. He went on writing all the time.

"Is she coming back to us?"

"No."



"Why did she go away?"

"I cannot tell you just now. She had a—a—fairly good reason."

"I thought she must have had that," said Lesley, brightening. "And did she come here to explain?"

"Partly."

"But why not to us?"

Caspar laid down his pen suddenly, and laughed. "Oh, the insatiable curiosity of women! I thought you were wiser than most, Lesley, but you have all the characteristics of your sex. I can't satisfy your curiosity to-day, but I will, if I can, in a short time. Will that do?"

Lesley seemed rather hurt. "I don't think I asked questions out of mere curiosity," she said. "I always liked Kingston."

"And she likes you, my dear—so far you were perfectly right," said her father, rising, and patting her on the arm. "To use your feminine parlance, she is quite as 'fond' of you as you can reasonably desire."

"I don't like to hear so much about 'feminine' ways and characteristics," said Lesley, smiling, and recovering her spirits. "I always fancy somebody has vexed you when you talk in that cynical manner."

"That remark is creditable to your penetration," said Mr. Brooke, in his accustomed tone of gentle raillery, "and you cannot say that it is not a very harmless way of letting off steam."

"Who has vexed you then?" said Lesley, looking keenly into his face. It was a bold question, but her father did not look displeased.

"Suppose I said—you yourself?" he queried, with a certain real gravity which she was not slow to discover.

The color rushed into her face. She thought of Maurice Kenyon, and the mistake that he had made. She had long been conscious of her father's disappointment, but had not expected him to speak of it. She made an effort to be equal to the situation.

"If you are vexed with me, it would be kinder to tell me of it than to sneer at all womankind in general," she said, with spirit.

"Right you are, my girl. Well—why have you refused Kenyon?"

Her eyes drooped. "I would rather you did not ask me that, father."

"Nonsense, Lesley. A plain answer to a plain question is easy to give. Are you in love with any one else?"

"No, indeed," she answered, vehemently; "I am not —"

And then, for some inexplicable reason, she stopped short.

"'Not in love with any one' was what she was going to say," said Caspar to himself, as he watched with keen eyes the changes of color and expression in her face. "And she does not dare to say it after all. What does that mean?" But he did not say this aloud.

"You don't care for Maurice, then?" he asked her.

She drew herself away from him and colored hotly, but made no other reply.

"My dear," said Caspar, half jestingly, half warningly, "you must let me remind you that silence is usually taken to mean consent."

And even then she did not speak.

"Really, of all incomprehensible creatures, women are the worst. Well, well! Tell me this, at any rate, Lesley: you have not given your heart to Oliver Trent?"

"Father! how can you ask?"

"Have you anything to complain of with respect to him? Has he always behaved to you with courtesy and consideration?"

"I would rather not say," Lesley answered, bravely.

"He—spoke as I did not like—once—or twice; but it is his wedding-day to-morrow, and I mean to forget it all."

"Once or twice! When was the last time, child? On Saturday? Here in this room? Ah, I see the truth in your face. Never mind how I know it. I want to know nothing more. Now you can go: I am busy, and shall probably have to be out late to-night."

With these words he led the girl gently out of the room, kissed her on the forehead before he shut the door, and then returned to his work. He did not dine with his sister and daughter, but sent a message of excuse. Later in the evening, Sarah reported to Miss Brooke that "Master had gone out, looking very much upset about something or other; and he'd taken his overcoat and his big stick, which showed, she supposed, that he was off to the slums he was so fond of." Sarah did not approve of slums.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## ETHEL KENYON'S WEDDING-DAY.

THE morning of Ethel Kenyon's wedding-day was as bright and sunny as any wedding day had need to be. The weather was unusually warm, and the trees were already showing the thin veil of green which is one of spring's first heralds in smoky London town. The window-boxes in the Square were gay with hyacinth and crocus-blossom. The flower-girls' baskets were brilliant with "market bunches" of wall-flowers and daffodils—these being the signs by which the dwellers in the streets know that the winter is over, that the time of the singing of birds has come, and that the voice of the turtle is heard in the land. The soft breezes blew a fragrance of violets and lilac-blossom from the gardens and the parks. London scarcely looked like itself, with the veil of smoke lifted away, and a fair blue sky, flecked with light silvery cloud, showing above the chimney-tops.

Ethel was up at seven o'clock, busying herself with the last touches to her packing and the consideration of her toilet; for she was much too active-minded to care for the seclusion in which brides sometimes preserve themselves upon their wedding-mornings. Some people might have thought that it would not be a very festive day, for her brother was the only near relative who remained to her, and an ancient uncle and aunt who had been, as Ethel herself phrased it, "routed out" for the occasion, were not likely to add much to the gaiety of nations by their presence. Mrs. Durant, lately Ethel's companion, was to remain in the house as Maurice's housekeeper, and she had nominally the control of everything; but Ethel was still the veritable manager of the day's arrangements. She had insisted on having her own way in all respects, and Oliver was not the man to say her nay—just then.

Mrs. Romaine had offered to stay the night with her, and help her to dress; but Ethel had smilingly refused

the companionship of her future sister-in-law. "Thanks very much," she had said, in the light and airy way which took the sting out of words that might otherwise have hurt their hearer; "but I don't think there's anything in which I want help, and Lesley Brooke is going to act as my maid on the eventful morn itself."

"Lesley Brooke?" said Mrs. Romaine. She could not altogether keep the astonishment out of her voice.

"Yes, why not?" asked Ethel, with just so much defiance in her voice as to put Mrs. Romaine considerably on her guard. "Have you any objection?"

"Dear Ethel, how can you ask such a thing? When you know how fond I am of Lesley."

"Are you?" asked Miss Kenyon lightly. "Do you know I should never have thought it, somehow. I am exceedingly fond of Lesley, and so"—with a little more color in her face than usual—"so is Oliver."

Bravely as she spoke, there was something in the accent which told of effort and repression. Mrs. Romaine admired her for that little piece of acting more than she had ever admired her upon the stage. She was too anxious for her brother's prosperity to say a word to disturb Ethel's serenity, whether it was real or assumed.

"I am so glad, dear," she said, sweetly. "Lesley is a dear girl, and thoroughly good and loving. I am quite sure you could not have a better friend, and she will be delighted to do anything she can for you."

"I don't know about that," said Ethel, with a little pout. "I had a great deal of trouble to get her to promise to come. She made all sorts of excuses—one would have thought that she did not want to see me married at all."

Which, Rosalind thought, might be very true. She had so strong a faith in the power of her brother's fascinations that she could not believe that he had actually "made love," as he had threatened, to Lesley Brooke without success.

Ethel spoke truly when she said that she had had great difficulty in persuading Lesley to come. After what had passed between herself and Oliver, Lesley felt herself a traitress in Ethel's presence. It seemed to her at first impossible to talk to Ethel about her pretty wedding gifts, her trousseau and her wedding tour, or to listen while she swore fidelity to Oliver Trent, when she knew what she

did know concerning the bridegroom's faith and honor. On the Sunday after the Brookes' evening party she had a very severe headache, and sent word to Ethel that she could not possibly come to her on the morrow. But Ethel immediately came over to see her, and poured forth questions, consolations, and laments in such profusion that Lesley, half blind and dazed, was fain to get rid of her by promising again that nothing should keep her away. And on Monday the headache had gone, and she had no excuse. It was not in Lesley's nature to simulate: she could not pretend that she had an illness when she was perfectly well. There was absolutely no reason that she could give either to the Kenyons or to Miss Brooke for not keeping her promise to sleep at Ethel's house on the Monday night, and be present at her wedding on Tuesday morning.

So she wound herself up to make the best it. It seemed to her that no girl had ever been placed in so painful a position before. We, who have more experience of life than Lesley had, know better than that. Lesley's position was painful indeed, but it might in many ways have been worse. But she, ignorant of real life, more ignorant even than most girls, because she knew so few of the pictures of real life that are to be found in the best kind of novels, had nothing but her native instincts of truth and courage to fall back upon, together with the strong will and power of judgment that she inherited from her father. These qualities, however, stood her in good stead that day. "It is no use to be weak," she said to herself. "What good shall I do to Ethel if I give her cause to suspect Oliver Trent's truth to her? The only question is—ought I to tell her—to put her on her guard? Oh, I think not—I hope not. If he marries her, he cannot help loving her; and it would break her heart—now—if I told her that he was not faithful. I must be brave and go to her, and be as sympathetic as usual—take pleasure in her pleasure, and try to forget the past! but I wish she were going to marry a man that one could trust, like my father, or like—Maurice."

She always called him Maurice when she thought about him now.

It took all the strength that she possessed, however, to go through the ordeal of those hours with Ethel. She managed to keep away until nearly nine o'clock on Monday night, and then—just after her father had gone out—she received

a peremptory little note from Ethel. "Why don't you come? You said you would come almost directly after dinner, and it is ever so late now. Oliver has just left me: he has business in the city, so I shall not see him again until to-morrow. Do come at once, or I shall begin to feel lonely."

So Lesley went.

She had to look at the wedding-cake, the wedding-gown, the simple little breakfast table. She sat up with Ethel until two in the morning, helping her to pack up her things, and listening to her praises of Oliver. That was the worst of it. Ethel *would* talk of Oliver, *would* descant on his perfections, and, above all, on his love for her. It was very natural talk on Ethel's part, but it was indescribably painful and humiliating to Lesley. Every moment of silence seemed to her like an implicit lie, and yet she could not bring herself to destroy the fine edifice of her friend's hopes, although she knew she could bring it down to the ground with a touch—a word.

"And I am so glad there is not to be a fuss," Ethel said at last, when St. Pancras' clock was striking two: "for I always thought that a fussy wedding would be horrid. You see, Lesley, I have dressed up so often in white satin and lace, as a bride, or a girl in a ballroom, or some other character not my own, that I feel now as if there would be no reality for me in a wedding if I did not wear rather every-day clothes. In a bride's conventional dress, I should only fancy myself on the stage again."

"You don't call the dress you are to wear to-morrow 'every-day clothes,' do you?" said Lesley, with a smiling glance towards the lovely gown in which Ethel had elected to be married, and then to wear during the first part of her wedding-journey.

"I call it just a nice, pretty frock—nothing else," said Ethel, complacently, "one that I can pay calls in afterwards. But I could not refuse the lovely lace Maurice insisted on giving me: so I shall wear a veil instead of a bonnet—it is the only concession I make to conventionality."

"I wish you would go to sleep, Ethel: you will look very pale under your veil to-morrow."

"Well, I will try; but I don't feel like it. I hope Maurice will be back in good time. It was very tiresome of that patient of his to send for him in such a hurry."

Then there was a silence, for both girls were growing sleepy; and it was with a yawn that Ethel at last inquired—

“Lesley, why won't your father come to my wedding?”

“Won't he?” said Lesley, with a little start

“Not he: I asked him again on Saturday, and he refused.”

“Perhaps,” said Lesley, not very steadily, “it gives him pain to be present at a wedding: he speaks sometimes—as if he did not like to hear of them.”

“Oh, you poor, dear thing, I had forgotten all that trouble,” said Ethel, giving her friend a hug which nearly strangled her; “but won't it come right in the end? Captain Duchesne says that she is so sweet, so charming—and your father is just delightful.”

“I think I can't talk about it,” said Lesley, very quietly.

“Then we won't. Did you know I had asked Captain Duchesne to the breakfast?”

“Oh, Ethel, how heartless of you!” Lesley said, laughing in spite of herself. For Captain Duchesne's devotion was patent to all the world.

At last they slept in each other's arms; but at seven o'clock Ethel was skimming about the room like a busy fairy, and it was Lesley, sleeping heavily after two or three wakeful nights, who had to be aroused by the little bride-elect, and Ethel laughed merrily to see her friend's start of surprise.

“Ethel! Ethel! People should be waiting on you and here you are bringing me tea and bread and butter. This is too bad!”

“It's a new departure,” Ethel laughed. “There is no law against a bride's making herself useful as well as ornamental, is there? You will have to hurry up, all the same, Lesley: we are dreadfully late already. And it is the loveliest morning you ever saw—and the bouquets have just come from the florist—and everything is charming! I feel as if I could dance.”

But Ethel's mirth did not communicate itself to Lesley. There was nothing forced or unnatural in the young bride's happiness, but Lesley felt as if some cloud, some shadow, were in the air. Perhaps she had had bad dreams. She would not damp Ethel's spirits by a word of warning, but the old aunt from the country who came to inspect her

niece as soon as she was dressed for church was not so considerate.

"You are letting your spirits run away with you, my dear," she said, reprovingly. "Even on a wedding-day there should not be too much laughter. Tears before night, when there has been laughter before breakfast, remember the proverb says."

"Oh, what a cheerful old lady!" said Ethel, brimming over with saucy laughter once more, as soon as the old dame's back was turned. "I don't care: I don't mean to be anything but a smiling bride—Oliver says that he hates tears at a wedding, and I don't mean him to see any."

Maurice arrived just in time to dress and to escort his sister to the church. It was not he, but Mrs. Durant, the companion and house-keeper, who first received a word of warning that things were not altogether as they should be. Others beside Lesley were scenting calamity in the air. Mrs. Romaine was to form one of the wedding-party. She made her appearance at a quarter to ten, beautifully dressed, but white to the very lips, and with a haggard look about her eyes. As soon as she entered the house she drew Mrs. Durant aside.

"Has Oliver been sleeping here?" she asked.

"*Here!*" Mrs. Durant's indignant accent was sufficient answer.

"He has not been home all night," Mrs. Romaine whispered.

"Not at home!"

"I suppose he is sleeping at his club and will come on from there," Mrs. Romaine answered, trying to reassure herself now that she had given the alarm to another. "Everything has been ordered—my bouquet came from him, at least from the florist's this morning—and I suppose we shall find him at the church. But I have been dreadfully anxious about him—quite foolishly, I daresay. Don't say anything to any body else."

Mrs. Durant did not mean to say anything, but—without exactly stating facts—she had managed in about three minutes to convey her own and Mrs. Romaine's feeling of discomfort to the whole party. The only exceptions were Maurice and Ethel, who, of course, heard nothing. A gloom fell upon the guests even while the carriages were standing at the door.



Lesley and Mrs. Romaine happened to be placed in the same carriage, facing one another. They looked at one another in silence, but with a mutual understanding that they had never felt before. Each read her own fear in the other's face. But the fear came from different sources. Lesley was afraid that Oliver had felt himself unable to fulfil his engagement to Ethel, and had therefore severed his connection with her by flight: Rosalind feared that he had been taken ill or met with some untoward accident. Only in Rosalind's mind there was always another fear in the back ground where her brothers were concerned—that one or other of them would be bringing himself and her to disaster and disgrace. She had no faith in them, and not much faith in herself.

There was no bridegroom in waiting at St. Pancras' Church. Mrs. Romaine held a hurried consultation with a friend, and a messenger was despatched to Oliver's club, where he sometimes slept, and also to the rooms which he called his "chambers" in the city. A little silence overspread the group of guests from the Kenyons' house. Other visitors, of whom there were not many, looked blithe enough; but gloom was plainly visible on the faces of the bride's friends. And a little whisper soon ran from group to group—"The bridegroom has not come."

If only he would appear before the bride! There was yet time. The carriage containing Ethel and her brother had not started from the door. But the distance was short, and speedily traversed: still Oliver did not come. And there at last was the wedding-chariot with its white silk linings and the white favors on the horses—and there was the pretty, smiling bride herself upon her brother's arm. How sweet she looked as she mounted the broad grey steps, with cheeks a little rosy, eyes downcast, and her smiles half concealed by the costly lace in which she had veiled herself! There was never a prettier bride than Ethel Kenyon, although she had not attired herself in all the bridal finery that many women covet.

Something in the expression of the faces that met her at the church door startled her a little when she first looked up: she changed color, and glanced wonderingly from one to another. Some one spoke in Maurice Kenyon's ear.

"What is it?" she asked, quickly. "Is anything wrong?"

"Oliver is late, dear, that is all. Just wait a minute—here by the door: he will be here presently."

"Late!" re-echoed the girl, turning suddenly pale. "Oh Maurice, what do you mean? *We* were late too—it is a quarter past ten."

"Hush, my darling, he will be here directly, and more distressed than any of us, no doubt."

"I should think so," said Ethel, trying to laugh. "Poor Oliver! what a state he will be in!"

But the hand with which she had suddenly clutched Lesley's arm trembled, and her lips were very white.

For a minute, for five, for ten minutes, the bridal party waited, but Oliver did not come. A messenger came back to say that he had not been at the club since the previous day. And then Maurice's hot temper blazed up. He left his sister and spoke to his old friend, Miss Brooke.

"Do not let Ethel make herself a laughing-stock," he said. "The man insults us by being late, and shall account to me for it, but she must be got out of this somehow. Can't you take her away?"

"Let her go to the vestry," said Miss Brooke. "You had better not take her away just yet—look at the crowd outside. I will get Lesley to persuade her."

Ethel made no opposition. She went quietly into the vestry, and sat down on a seat that was offered to her, waiting in silence, asking no questions. Then there was a short period of whispered consultation, of terrible suspense. She herself did not know whether the time was short or long. She could not bear even Lesley's arm about her, or the support of Maurice's brotherly hand. Harry Duchesne's dark face in the background seemed in some inexplicable sort of way the worst of all. For she knew that he loved and admired her, and she was shamed by a recreant lover before his very eyes.

After a time Maurice was called out. A policeman in plain clothes wanted to speak to him. They had five minutes' conversation together, and then the young doctor returned to the room where Ethel was still sitting. His face was as white as that of his sister now, and she was the first to remark the change.

"You have heard something," she said, springing to her feet and fixing her great dark eyes upon his face.

"Yes, Ethel, my poor darling, yes. Come home with me."

"Not till you tell me the truth."

"Not here, my darling—wait till we get home. Come at once."

"I must know, Maurice: I cannot bear to wait. Is he—is he—*dead*?"

He would gladly have refused to answer, but his pallid lips spoke for him. And from another group a shriek rang out from the lips of Rosalind Romaine—a shriek that told her all.

"Dead? Murdered? Oh, no, no—it cannot be?" cried Oliver's sister. "Not dead! not dead!"

She fell back in violent hysterics, but Ethel neither wept nor cried aloud. She stood erect, her head a little higher than usual, a smile that might almost be called proud curving her soft lips.

"You see," she said, unsteadily, but very clearly; "you see—it was not his fault. He *would* have come—if he had been—alive."

And then, still smiling, she gave her hand to her brother and let him lead her away. But before she had crossed the threshold of the room, he was obliged to take her in his arms to save her from falling, and it was in his arms that she was carried back to the carriage which she had left so smilingly.

But for those who were left behind there was more bad news to hear. In London no secret can be kept even from the ears of those whose heart it breaks to hear it. Before noon the newsboys were crying in the streets—

"Brutal murder of a gentleman on his wedding-day. Arrest of a well-known journalist."

And everywhere the name bandied from pillar to post was that of Mr. Caspar Brooke, who had been arrested on suspicion of having caused the death of Oliver Trent.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## IN ETHEL'S ROOM.

To those who knew Caspar Brooke best, it seemed ridiculously impossible that he should have been accused of any act of violence. But the accusation was made with so much circumstantial detail that no course seemed open to the police but to arrest him with as little delay as possible. And before the ill-fated wedding party had been dispersed, before Miss Brooke could hurry home, and long before Lesley suspected the blow that was in store for her, he had been taken by two policemen in plain clothes to the Bow Street Police station.

The full extent of the misfortune did not burst upon Doctor Sophy all at once. When she left the church the accusation was not publicly known, and as she walked home she reflected on the account that she must give to her brother of the extraordinary events of the day. She wished he had been present, and wondered why he had shirked the invitation which had been sent him by Ethel. He was not usually out of bed at this hour, but she resolved to go to his room and tell him the story at once, for, though he had never cared much for poor Oliver Trent, he had always been fond of Ethel. Lesley had gone to the Kenyons' house at Maurice's earnest request, and might not be back for some time.

She opened the door with her latch-key, and, to her great surprise, was confronted at once by Sarah, her face swollen, and her eyes red with weeping.

"Sarah! why—have you heard the dreadful news already?" said Miss Brooke.

"Have *you* heard it, is more the question. I'm thinking?" said Sarah, grimly.

"Of course you mean—about poor Mr. Trent?"

"More than that, ma'am. However, here's a letter from master to you, and that'll tell you more than I can do." And Sarah handed a note to her mistress, and retired to the back of the hall, sniffing audibly.

Miss Brooke walked into the dining-room and opened the note. Caspar had gone out, she gathered from the fact of his having written to her at all: perhaps he had heard of Oliver Trent's death, and had gone to offer his services to Maurice, or to assist in discovering the murderer. So she thought to herself; and then she began to read the note.

In another minute Sarah heard a strange, muffled cry; and running into the room found that Miss Brooke had sunk down on the sofa, and was trembling in every limb. Her brother's letter was crushed within her hand.

"What does it mean, Sarah?—what does it mean?" she stammered, with a face so white and eyes so terror-stricken that Sarah took her to task at once.

"It means a great, big lie, ma'am, that's all it means. Why, you ain't going to be put about by that, I hope, when master himself says—as he said to me—that he'd be home afore night! I'm ashamed of you, looking as pale as you do, and you a doctor and all!"

"Did he say to you he would be home before night?" said Miss Brooke collecting herself a little, but still looking very white.

Sarah took a step nearer to her, and spoke in a low voice. "Nobody else in the house knows where he's gone," she said, "but I know, for master called me himself, and told me what they wanted him for. It was two men in plain clothes, and there was a cab outside and a p'liceman on the box. 'Of course it's all a mistake, Sarah,' he said to me, as light-hearted as you please, 'and don't let Miss Lesley or your Missus be anxious. I dare say I shall be back in an hour or two.' And then he asked the men if he might write a note, and they let him, though they read it as he wrote, the nasty wretches!"—and Sarah snorted contemptuously, while she wiped away a tear from her left eye with her apron.

"But it is so extraordinary—so ridiculous!" said Miss Brooke. And then, with a little more color in her face, she read her brother's letter over again.

It consisted only of these words—

"DEAR SOPHY,—Don't worry yourself. The police have got it into their wise heads that I had something to do with poor Trent's tragic end. I dare say I shall be back soon, but I must go and hear what they've got to say. Take care of Lesley.—C. B."

"Take care of Lesley ! As if *she* wanted taking care of !" said Miss Brooke, with sudden energy. "Sarah, go over at once to Mr. Kenyon's, and tell Miss Lesley to come home. She can't stay *there* while this is going on. It isn't decent."

Sarah was rather glad to execute this order. She was of opinion that Miss Lesley needed to be taken down a bit, and that this was the way in which the Lord saw fit to do it. And it never occurred to Miss Brooke to caution the woman against startling Lesley or hurting her feelings. *She* had been startled certainly, and almost overcome ; but she belonged to that class of middle-aged women who think that their emotions must necessarily be stronger than those of young people, because they are older and understand what sorrow means, whereas the reverse is usually the case. Besides, Miss Brooke quite underrated the warmth of Lesley's attachment to her father, and was not prepared to see her experience anything but shallow and commonplace regret.

So Sarah went to the house opposite and knocked at the door. She had to knock twice before the door was opened, for the whole household was out of joint. The maids were desperately clearing away all signs of festivity—flowers, wedding-cake, the charming little breakfast that had been prepared for the guests—everything that told of wedding preparation, and had now such a ghastly look. Under Mrs. Durant's direction the servants were endeavoring to restore to the rooms their wonted appearance. Ethel's trunks had been piled into an empty room : she would not want her trousseau now, poor child. The uncle from the country was pacing up and down the deserted drawing-room ; the aunt was fussing about Ethel's dressing-room, nervously folding up articles of clothing and putting away trifles. All the blinds were down, as if for a funeral. And in Ethel's own room, the girl lay on her bed, white and rigid as a corpse, with half-shut eyes that did not seem to see, and fingers so tightly closed that the nails almost ran into her soft palms. Since she had been laid there she had not spoken ; no one could quite tell whether she were conscious or not ; but Lesley, who sat beside her, and sometimes laid her cheek softly against the desolate young bride's cold face, or kissed the ashen-grey lips, divined by instinct that she was not unconscious although

stunned by the force of the blow—that she was thinking, thinking, thinking all the time—thinking of her lost lover, of her lost happiness, and beating herself passionately against the wall of darkness which had arisen between her and the future that she had planned for herself and Oliver.

Sarah asked at once for Miss Lesley Brooke, and Mrs. Durant came out of the dining-room to speak to the messenger.

“Is Miss Brooke wanted very particularly?” she asked. “Miss Kenyon will not have any one else with her.”

“I think I must speak to Miss Lesley, ma’am; my mistress said I must,” said Sarah, primly. Then, forgetting her loyalty to her employers in her desire to be communicative, she went on—“Maybe you haven’t heard what’s happened, ma’am. Mr. Brooke’s been taken up on the charge of murder——”

This was not strictly true, but it was the way in which Sarah read the facts.

“And Miss Brooke says Miss Lesley *must* come home, as it is not proper for her to stay.”

The horror depicted on Mrs. Durant’s face was quite as great as Sarah had anticipated, and even more so. For Mrs. Durant, a conventional and narrow-minded woman, did not know enough of Caspar Brooke’s character to feel any indignation at the accusation: indeed, she was the sort of woman who was likely to put a vulgar construction upon his motives, and regard it as probable that he had quarreled with Oliver for not wishing to marry Lesley instead of Ethel Kenyon. And she at once grasped the situation. Under the circumstances—if Caspar Brooke had killed Ethel’s lover—it was most improper that Caspar Brooke’s daughter should be staying in the house.

“Of course!” she said, with a shocked face. “Miss Lesley Brooke must go at once—naturally. How very terrible! I am much obliged to Miss Brooke for sending—as Ethel’s chaperon I couldn’t undertake—— I’ll go upstairs and send her down to you.”

Sarah was left in the hall, while Mrs. Durant went upstairs. But after a time the lady came down with a troubled air.

“I can’t get her to come,” she said. “You must go up yourself, Sarah, and speak to her. She will come into the dressing-room, she says, for a minute, but she cannot leave

Miss Kenyon for a longer time. You must tell her quietly what has happened, and then she will no doubt see the advisability of going away."

Sarah went upstairs, therefore, and entered the dressing-room, where the old aunt was still busy; and in a minute or two Lesley appeared.

"What is it?" she said, briefly.

"Your aunt sent me to say you must come home at once, miss."

"I cannot come just yet: Miss Kenyon wishes me to stay with her," said Lesley, with dignity.

"You'd better come, Miss Lesley. I don't want to tell you the dreadful news just now: you'd better hear it at home. Then you'll be glad you came. It's your pa, miss."

"My father! Oh, Sarah, what do you mean? Is he ill? is he dead? What is it?"

"He's been arrested, miss, for killing Mr. Trent."

Sarah spoke in a whisper, but it seemed to her hearers as if she had shouted the words at the top of her voice. Mrs. Durant pressed her hands together and uttered a little scream. Lesley turned deadly white, and laid one hand on the back of a chair, as if for support. And the old aunt immediately ran into the inner room, and burst into tears over Ethel's almost inanimate form, bewailing her, and calling her a poor, injured, heartbroken girl, until Ethel opened her great dark eyes, and fixed them upon the aged, distorted face with a questioning look.

"Lesley!" she breathed. "I want Lesley."

"Oh, my dearest child, you must do without Lesley now. It is not fit that she should come to you."

But Ethel's lips again formed the same sounds: "I want Lesley." And the old lady continued—

"She must not come, dear: you cannot see Lesley Brooke again. It is her father who has done this terrible thing—blighted your life—destroyed your happiness——"

And so she would have babbled on had not Ethel all at once raised herself in her bed, with white face and flaming eyes, and called in tones as clear and resonant as ever—

"Lesley! Lesley! come back!"

And then the old aunt was silent: silent and amazed.

From the next room Lesley came, softly and swiftly as was her wont. Her face was pale, but her eyes and lips



were steady. She went straight to Ethel; was at once encircled by the girl's arms, and drew Ethel's head down upon her shoulder.

"Shall I go?" she whispered in Ethel's ear.

"No, no; don't leave me."

"You know what they say? Can you trust my father?"

"I trust you both. Stay with me."

Lesley raised her head and looked back at the little group of meddlesome women who had tried to tear her from her friend's side. At the look they disappeared. They dared not say another word after meeting the rebuke conveyed in Lesley's pale, set face and resolute eyes. They closed the door behind them, and left the two girls alone.

For a long time neither spoke. Ethel seemed to have relapsed once more into a semi-unconscious state. Lesley sat motionless, pillowing her friend's head against her shoulder, and stroking one of her hands with her own. Now and then hot tears welled over and dropped upon Ethel's dark, curly head, but Lesley did not try to wipe them away. She scarcely knew that she was crying: she was only aware of a great weight of trouble that had come upon her—trouble that seemed to include in its effects all that she held most dear. Trouble not only to her friend, but to her father, her mother, her lover. Not a shadow of doubt as to her father's innocence rested upon her mind: there was no perplexity, no shame—only sorrow and anxiety. Not many women could have borne the strain of utter silence with such a burden laid on them to bear. But to Lesley, even in that hour, Ethel's trouble was greater than her own.

An hour must have passed away before Ethel murmured,

"Lesley—are you there?"

"Yes, I am with you, darling: I am here."

"You are crying."

"I am crying for you, Ethel, dear."

For the first time, Ethel's hand answered to her pressure. After a little silence, she spoke again—

"I wish I could die—too."

"My poor little Ethel."

"I suppose there is no chance of that. People—like me—don't die. They only suffer—and suffer—and break their hearts—and live till they are eighty. Oh, if you were kind to me, you would give me something to make me die."

She shuddered, and crept a little closer to Lesley's bosom. "Oh, why must he go—without me—without me?" she cried. And then she burst out suddenly into bitter weeping, and with Lesley's arms about her she wept away some of the "perilous stuff" of misery which had seemed likely to destroy the balance of her brain. When those tears came her reason was saved, and Lesley was wise enough to be reassured and not alarmed by them.

She was very much exhausted when the burst of tears was over, and Lesley was allowed to feed her with strong soup, which she took submissively from her friend. "You won't go?" she whispered, when the meal was done. And Lesley whispered back: "I will not go, darling, so long as you want me here."

"I want you—always." Then with a gleam of returning strength and memory: "What was it they said about your father?"

Lesley shivered.

"Never mind, Ethel, dear," she said.

"But—I know—I remember. That he was—a—oh, I can't say the word. But that is not true."

"I *know* it is not true. It is a foolish, cruel mistake."

"It could not be true," Ethel murmured. "He was always kind and good. Tell him—from me—that I don't believe it, Lesley. And don't let them take you away from me."

Holding Lesley's hand in hers, at last she fell asleep; and sleep was the very thing that was likely to restore her.

The doctor came and went, forbidding the household to disturb the quiet of the sick-room; and after a time, Lesley, exhausted by the excitements and anxieties of the day, laid her head on the pillow and also slept. It was late in the afternoon when Maurice Kenyon, stealing softly into the room, found the two heads close together on one pillow, the arms interlaced, the slumber of one as deep as of the other. His eyes filled with tears as he looked at the sleeping figures. "Poor girls!" he muttered to himself. "Well for them if they can sleep; but I fear that theirs will be a sad awakening."

Suddenly Lesley opened her eyes. The color rushed to her pale cheeks as she saw who was regarding her, but she had sufficient self-control not to start or move too hastily. Ethel altered her position at that moment, and

left Lesley free to rise, then sank back to slumber. And, obeying a silent motion of Maurice Kenyon's hand, Lesley followed him noiselessly into the dressing-room.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## THE EVIDENCE.

"SHE ought not to be left alone : I promised not to leave her," said Lesley in a low tone.

"I have brought a nurse with me. She can go in and sit by the bed until you are ready to return," said Maurice, quietly. "Call us, nurse, if my sister wakes and asks for us ; but be very careful not to disturb her unnecessarily."

The nurse, whose face Lesley scanned with involuntary interest, was gentle and sensible-looking, with kindly eyes and a strong, well-shaped mouth. She looked like a woman to be trusted ; and Lesley was therefore not sorry to see her pass into Ethel's room. She had felt very conscious of her own ignorance of nursing during the past few hours, and had not much confidence in the sense or judgment of any woman in the house. Maurice made her sit down, and then stood looking at her for a moment.

"You are terribly pale," he said at last. "Will you come downstairs and let me give you something to eat and drink?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I want nothing. And Ethel may need me : I cannot bear to be far away."

"Have you had nothing all day ? It is after five o'clock."

She shook her head.

"Then you must eat before I talk to you. I have several things to say, and you must have strength to listen. Sit still : I will be back directly."

He went away, and Lesley leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. She was very weary, but even in her trouble there was some sweetness for her in the knowledge that Maurice was attending to her needs. When he returned with wine and food, she roused herself to accept both, knowing very well that he would not tell her what she wanted to hear until she had done his bidding. The door between bed and dressing room was closed ; the house was very quiet, and the light was dim. Maurice spoke at last, in grave, low tones.

"I have just come from your father," he said.

Lesley started and clasped her hands. "Is he at home again?"

"No. They would not let him go. But take heart—we, who know him, will stand by him until he is a free man."

"Then you believe—as I believe?" she asked, tremulously.

"Would it be possible for me to do otherwise? Hasn't he been my friend for many a year? You have surely no need to ask!"

Lesley, looking up at him, stretched out her hand in silence. He took it in both his own and kissed it tenderly. Seeing her grief, and seeing also her sympathy for another woman who grieved, had, for the time being, cured him of his anger against her. He had cherished some bitter feeling towards her for a while; but he forgot it now.

"I am as sure," he said, fervently, "that Caspar Brooke could not commit murder as I am sure that *you* could not. It is an absurdity to think of it."

"Then what has made people think of it?" asked Lesley. "How has it come about?"

Maurice paused. "There is a mystery somewhere," he said slowly, "which is a little difficult to fathom. Can you bear to hear the details? Your father told me to tell them to you—as gently as I could."

"Tell me all—all, please."

"Poor Oliver Trent was found dead early this morning on the stair of a lodging-house in Whitechapel. I have been to the place myself: it is now under the care of the police. He had been beaten about the head . . . it was very horrible . . . with a thick oaken staff or walking stick . . . the stick lay beside him, covered with blood, where he was found. The stick was—was your father's, unfortunately: it must have been stolen by some ruffian for the purpose—and—and——"

He stopped short, as if the story were too hard to tell. Lesley sat watching his face, which was as pale as her own.

"Go on," she said, quickly. "What else?"

"A pocket-book—with gilt letters on the back: C. B. distinctly marked. That was also found on the stairs, as if it had dropped from the pocket of some man as he went down. And it is proved—indeed, your father tells me so—

that he went to that house last night and did not leave it until nearly midnight."

"But why was he there?"

"He went to see the man and woman who lived in the top room of that lodging-house. I think you know the woman. She was once your maid——"

"Mary Kingston? She came to our house that very afternoon. She must have asked my father to go to see her—he spoke kindly of her to me. But why did Mr. Trent go there too?"

"There have been secrets kept from us which have now come to light," said Maurice, sadly. "Oliver went there to see his brother Francis, who was ill in bed; and his brother's wife was no other than the woman who acted as your maid, Mary Kingston—or rather Mary Trent. Kingston left your house on Saturday, it seems, because she had caught sight of her husband in the street: he had been very ill, and she felt herself obliged to go home with him and put him to bed. He has been in bed, unable to rise, she tells me, ever since."

"But she—*she*," said Lesley eagerly, "can explain the whole matter. She must have heard the fight—the scuffle—whatever it was—upon the stairs. She ought to be able to tell when father left the house—and when Mr. Trent left the house. They did not go together, did they?" there was a touch of scorn in her voice.

"No, they did not go together. But what Mrs. Trent alleges is, that your father waited for Oliver on the stairs, and attacked him there. It is a malicious, wicked lie—I am sure of that. But it is what she says she is willing to swear."

"Mrs. Trent!" Lesley repeated vaguely. "Mrs. Trent! Do you mean—Kingston? *Kingston* swears that my father lay in wait for Oliver Trent upon the stairs? It is impossible!"

"Yes, Kingston," Maurice answered, in a low, level voice. "It is Kingston who has accused your father of the crime."

Lesley covered her face with her hands, and for a moment or two did not speak. "It is too terrible," she said at last, not very steadily. "I do not know how to believe it. I always trusted her. Is there nobody worth trusting in the world? Is there no truth and faith anywhere at all?"

The tears were raining down her cheeks as she spoke. Maurice looked at her with wistful tenderness.

"Can you ask that question when you have *such* a father?" he asked. "And I—have I done anything to deserve your want of trust?"

She could only sob out incoherent words by way of answer. "Not you—not my father—I was thinking—of others—others I have trusted and been deceived in."

"Oliver Trent," he said—not as a question so much as by way of sad assertion. She drew her handkerchief away from her eyes immediately, and gazed at him through her tears, with flushed cheeks and panting breath. What did he mean? He did not leave her long in doubt.

"Kingston—Mrs. Trent—has told a strange story," he said. "She avers that Oliver was false—false to my poor little sister who believed in him so entirely—false to himself and false to us. They say you knew of this. She says that he—he made love to you, that he asked you to marry him—to run away with him indeed—so late as last Saturday. She had hidden herself between the folding-doors in order to hear what went on. Lesley, is this true?"

She was white enough now. She cast one appealing glance at his face, and then said, almost inaudibly—

"Don't tell Ethel."

"Then it was true?"

"Quite true!"

"Oh, my God!" cried Maurice, involuntarily. He did not use the words with any profane intention: they escaped his lips as a sort of cry of agony, of protest, almost of entreaty. He had hoped until this moment that Lesley would be able to deny this charge. When she acknowledged its truth, the conviction of Oliver's falsity, the suspicion of Lesley's faith, smote him like a blow. He drew back from her a little and looked at her steadfastly. Lesley raised her candid, innocent eyes to his, and, after a moment's silence, made her defence.

"I could not help it. If Kingston speaks the truth, she will tell you that. He locked the door so that I could not get out, and then . . . I said I would never speak to him again. I was never so angry—so ashamed—in all my life. You must not think that I—I too—was false to Ethel. She is my friend, and I never dreamed of taking him away from her. I never cared—in that way—for him, and even if I had——"

"You never cared? Did you not love him, too?"

"No! no, indeed! I hated him. If Kingston says so she is lying about me, as she is lying about my father. You say that you do not believe her when she speaks against him: surely you won't believe her when she speaks against me? Can't you trust my father's daughter, as well as my father?"

The voice was almost passionate in its pleading: the lovely eyes were eloquent of reproach. Maurice felt his whole being quiver: he was shaken to the very depths. Why should she plead to him in this way if she had no love at all for *him*? Why should she be so anxious that he should trust her? And did he not? He could not look into her face and think for one moment that she lied.

"I do trust—your father's daughter," he said, hoarsely. "I trust her above all women living!—God knows that I do. You did not love Oliver? It was not to *him* that you made some promise you spoke of—some promise against engaging yourself?"

"It was to my mother," said Lesley, simply. "I am sorry that I did not make you understand."

He took a quick step nearer. "May I say more?"

She shook her head.

"But—some day?"

"Not now," she answered, softly. But a very faint and tremulous smile quivered for one moment on her lips. It is very wrong to talk of ourselves just now. Go on with your story—tell me about my dear, dearest father."

"I will," said Maurice. "I will do exactly what you wish—*just now*"—with a great accent on the last two words. "We will talk about that promise at a more fitting time, Lesley—I may call you Lesley, may I not? There is no harm in that, for you are like a sister to my poor Ethel, and you may as well let me be a brother to you, dear, *just now*. Well, Lesley"—how he lingered over the name!—"Mrs. Trent says that she returned to your house on Monday afternoon in order to warn your father of what was going on——"

"Oh! Did she really?"

"Yes, for your father tells me she did so. She also told him various stories of Oliver's baseness, which he felt it his duty to inquire into, and in order that he might have an interview with Oliver, she arranged with him to come that



night to the house in Whitechapel, where she and her husband were living. There she was to confront him with Oliver, and she said that in *her* presence he would not dare to deny that her tales were true."

"But why did father agree to that? Why did he want to find out?"

"For Ethel's sake. He wanted to protect her. If Mrs. Trent could prove her stories, he meant to expose Oliver to Ethel and myself, if it were but an hour before her marriage——"

"And why didn't he?" demanded Lesley, breathlessly.

"Because"—here comes in your father's evidence—"your father assures me that when he reached the house that night and confronted Oliver, the woman took back every word that she had uttered, and declared that it was all a lie. And Oliver, of course, persisted that he had done nothing amiss. Your father says he was so much tempted to strike Oliver to the ground—for he did not believe in Kingston's retraction—that he flung his stick out upon the landing lest he should use it too effectually. He forgot to pick it up, and came away without it. The pocket-book must of course have fallen out of his pocket as he left the house."

"Then he could not convict Mr. Trent of anything?"

"No, and so he did not feel justified in meddling. But he wishes that he had gone to Ethel at once—or that I had been at home and that he had come to me. He is reproaching himself terribly for his silence now."

"As I have been reproaching myself for mine," said Lesley.

"You have no need. Ethel would never have believed the stories—and as Mrs. Trent denied them again, I think that Oliver would have carried the day. But let her deny them as she will, I believe that they were true, and that Oliver was a villain. Our poor Ethel may live to bless the day when she was delivered from him."

"I am afraid she will never believe us, or forgive us if she does," sighed Lesley. "But what else happened?"

"Your father left the building, after a long and angry conversation, about midnight. Oliver remained behind. Of course your father knows nothing more. But Mrs. Trent says that Oliver went away ten minutes later, and that she then heard loud words and the sound of a struggle upon

the stairs. Fights are too common in that neighborhood to excite much remark. She, however, feeling anxious, stole down the upper flight of stairs, and distinctly saw Mr. Brooke and her brother-in-law struggling together. She maintains that Mr. Brooke's stick was in his hand."

"How wickedly false! Why did she not scream if she saw such a sight?"

"She was afraid. And she says that she did not think it would come to—*murder*. She crept back to her room again, and in a few minutes everything was quiet. Only—in the early morning the dead body of Oliver Trent was found upon the stairs, and then she gave information as to what she had seen and heard?"

There was a short silence. Then Lesley said, very tremulously—"It sounds like a plot—a plot against my dear father's good name!"

"And a very cleverly concocted plot too," thought Maurice to himself in silent rage; but he dared not say so much aloud. He only answered, tenderly—

"Such a plot can never come to good, Lesley. You and I together—we will unravel it—we will clear your father, and bring him back to the world again."

"He is not coming home just yet, then?"

"I am afraid—dear, do not tremble so—he will have to take his trial. But he will be acquitted, you will see."

She let him press her fingers to his lips again, and made no outward sign; but the two looked into each other's eyes, and each was conscious of the presence of a deadly fear.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## A VAIN APPEAL.

LESLEY went home to sleep, and learned from her aunt the details of her father's arrest. "But he will be back in a few hours," said Miss Brooke, obstinately. "They will be obliged to let him go. They will accept bail, of course. Mr. Kenyon thinks they will."

"Has Mr. Kenyon been here?"

"Oh, yes; he brought me a message from Caspar. What a horrible thing it is! But the ridiculous—absurd—part of it is that your father should be accused. Why, your father was very friendly with Oliver Trent—at least he used to be!" Then Miss Brooke paused, and fired an unexpected question at her niece. "Have you any reason to think he was not?"

Lesley winced and hesitated. "I don't think he liked Mr. Trent very much," she said, at last; "but that is a different thing——"

"From killing him? I should think so!" said Doctor Sophy, in a high tone of voice. She was in her dressing-gown, and sitting before the fire that had been lighted in her own little sanctum upstairs; but she was not smoking as she was usually at that hour. The occasion was too serious for cigarettes: Doctor Sophy was denying herself. Perhaps that was the reason why she looked so haggard and so angry, as she turned suddenly and spoke to her niece in a somewhat excited way.

"What made him unfriendly? Do you not know? It was because you flirted with Oliver Trent! I really think you did, Lesley, And I know your father thought so too."

"Then he ought to have been vexed with me, not with Oliver," said Lesley, standing her ground, but turning very pale.

"Yes, yes, but you are a girl, and he did not like to blame you. He spoke rather strongly about Oliver Trent

to me. However, it is no use saying so now. We had better keep that phase of the matter as quiet as we can."

"Aunt Sophy," said Lesley, in a tremulous tone, "you don't mean—you don't think—that my—my *flirting*, as you call it, with Mr. Trent will be spoken of and tend to hurt my father—my father's good name?"

Aunt Sophy stared at her. "Of course it would hurt your father's chances if it *were* talked about," she said, rather sharply. "I don't see how it could do otherwise. People would say that he might have quarrelled with Oliver about you, you know. But we must try to keep the matter as quiet as we can. *I'm* prepared to swear that they were bosom-friends, and that I never heard Caspar say a word against him; and you had better follow my example."

"But, Aunt Sophy—if I can't——"

"If you want to come the Jeanie Deans' business, my dear," said Miss Brooke, "you had better reflect that personal application to the Queen for a pardon will not help you very much now-a-days. I must confess that, although I admire Jeanie Deans very much, I don't intend to emulate her. It's my opinion too that most women will tell lies for the sake of men they love, but not for the sake of women."

"Oh, Aunt Sophy!"

"It is no good making exclamations," said Aunt Sophy, with unusual irritability. "If you are different from all other women, I can't help it. I once thought that I was different myself, but I find I am as great a fool as any of them. There, go to bed, child! Things will turn out all right by and by. Nobody could be so absurd as to believe ill of your father."

"You think it will be all right?" said Lesley, wistfully.

"Don't ask me to believe in a God in heaven, if things go badly with Caspar," said Miss Brooke, curtly. "Haven't I lived ten years in the house with the man, and don't I know that he would not hurt a fly? He's the gentlest soul alive, although he looks so big and strong: the gentlest, softest-hearted, most generous—— But I suppose it is no good saying all that to your mother's daughter?"—and Miss Brooke picked up a paper-covered volume that had fallen to her feet, and began to read.

"I am my father's daughter too," said Lesley, with rather tremulous dignity, as she turned away. She was too

indignant with Miss Brooke to wish her good-night, and meant to leave the room without another word. But Miss Brooke, dropping her book on her red flannel lap, and looking uneasily over her shoulder at her niece's retreating figure, would not let her go.

"Come, Lesley, don't be angry," she said. "I am so upset that I hardly know what I am saying. Come here and kiss me, child, I did not mean to vex you."

And Lesley came back and kissed her aunt, but in silence, for her heart was sore within her. Was it perhaps true—or partially true—that she had been the cause of the misery that had come upon them all? Indirectly and partially, unintentionally and without consciousness of wrong-doing—and yet she could not altogether acquit herself of blame. Had she been more reserved, more guarded in her behavior, Oliver Trent would never have fallen in love with her. Would this have mended matters? If, as she gathered, the sole reason of her father's visit to the Trents had been to assure himself of the true nature of her relations with Oliver—her cheeks burned as she put the matter in that light, even to herself—why, then, she could not possibly divest herself of responsibility. Of course she could not for one moment imagine that her father had lifted his hand against Oliver; but his visit to the house shortly before the murder gave a certain air of plausibility to the tale: and for this Lesley felt herself to blame.

She went to her own room and lay down, but she could not sleep. There was a hidden joy at the bottom of her heart—a joy of which she was half ashamed. The relief of finding that Maurice was still her friend—it was so that she phrased it to herself—was indeed very great. And there was a strange and beautiful hope for the future, which she dared not look at yet. For it seemed to her as if it would be a sort of treason to dream of love and joy and hope for herself when those that she loved best—and she herself also—were involved in one common downfall, one common misfortune of so terrible a kind. The thought of her father—detained, she knew not where: she had a childish vision of a felon's cell, very different indeed from the reality of the plain but fairly comfortable room with which Mr. Caspar Brooke had been accommodated? and she shuddered at the thought of the days before him, of

the public examinations, of the doubt and shame and mystery in which poor Oliver Trent's death was enwrapped. She thought of Ethel, now under the influence of a strong narcotic, from which she would not awake until the morning; and she shrank in imagination from that awakening to despair. And she thought of others who were more or less concerned in the tragedy; of Mary Kingston—though she could not remember her without a shudder—of Mrs. Romaine, who had loved her brother so tenderly; and of Lady Alice, the woman whose husband was in prison for a crime of which Lesley was willing to swear that he was innocent.

When her thoughts once reached her mother, they stayed and would not be diverted. She could not sleep: she could think of nothing but the mother and the father whom she loved. And she wept over the failure of her schemes for their reunion. All hope of that was at an end. It was impossible that Lady Alice should not believe him guilty. She had always judged him harshly, and taken the worst possible view of his behavior. Lesley remembered that she had not—in common parlance—"had a good word to say for him," when she spoke of him in the convent parlor. What would she say now, and how could Lesley make her see the truth?

The fruit of her reflections became evident at breakfast-time next morning. Lesley came downstairs with her hat on and a mantle over her arm.

"Where are you going?" Miss Brooke asked. "Not to poor Ethel, I hope? I am very sorry for her, but really, Lesley——"

"I am going to mamma," said Lesley.

"Going to—— Well, upon my word! Lesley, I did think you had a little more feeling for your father! Going—— Well, I shall not countenance it. I shall not let your boxes go out of the house. It is simply disgraceful."

"But I don't want my boxes," said Lesley, rather forlornly helping herself to a cup of coffee. "What have my boxes to do with it, Aunt Sophy? I shall be back in an hour. Mr. Kenyon said we should be able to see father to-day, and I do not want to be away when he comes."

"Then—then you don't mean to *stay* with your mamma?" gasped Aunt Sophy.

Lesley could not help a little laugh, but the tears came into her brown eyes as she laughed. "Would you mind very much if I did, Aunt Sophy?" she asked, setting down her cup of coffee.

"I should mind for this reason," said Miss Brooke, stoutly, "that if you ran away from your father's house now, people would say that you thought him guilty. It would go against him terribly. Sooner than that, I would lock you into your own room and prevent your going by main force."

"I believe you would," said Lesley, "and so would I, in your place, Aunt Sophy. But you need not be afraid. I am as proud of my father and as full of faith in him as even you can be; and if I go to see my mother, it is only that I may tell her so, and let her understand that she has no cause to be afraid for him. The color came to her face as she spoke, and she lifted her head so proudly that Aunt Sophy felt—for a moment or two—slightly abashed.

"I will be back in an hour," Lesley went on, firmly, "and I hope that Mr. Kenyon will wait for me if he comes before I return."

"Am I to tell him where you have gone?" asked Miss Brooke, with a slight touch of sharpness in her voice.

And Lesley replied, "Certainly. And my father, too, if you see him before I do. I am not doing anything wrong."

Greatly to her surprise, Miss Brooke got up and kissed her. "My dear," she said, "you are very like your father, and I am sure you won't do anything to hurt his feelings; but are you quite sure that you need go to Lady Alice just at present?"

"Quite sure, Aunt Sophy." And then Miss Brooke sighed, shook her head, and let her go, with the air of one who sees a person undertake a hopeless quest. For she fancied that Lesley was going to make an attempt to reconcile the husband and wife who had been so long separated, and she did not believe that any such attempt was likely to succeed. But she had not fathomed Lesley's plan aright.

The girl took a hansom and drove at once to her mother's house. She knew well where it was situated, but she had never visited it before. It was a small house, but in a good position, close to the Green Park, and at any other moment

Lesley would have been struck by the air of distinction that it had already achieved. It was painted differently from the neighboring houses : the curtains and flower-boxes in the windows were remarkably fresh and dainty, the neat maid who opened the front door was neater and smarter than other people's maids. Lesley was informed that her ladyship was not up yet ; and the servant seemed to think that she had better go away on receiving this information.

"I will come in," said Lesley, quietly. "I am Miss Brooke. You can take my name up to her first, if you like. but I want to see her at once."

The maid looked doubtful, but at this moment Mrs. Dayman was seen crossing the hall, and her exclamation of mingled pleasure and dismay caused Lesley to be admitted without further parley.

Lady Alice was up, but not fully dressed ; she was breakfasting in a dressing-room or boudoir, which opened out of her own sleeping apartment. As soon as Lesley entered she started up ; and the girl noticed at the first glance that her mother was looking ill, but perhaps the richly-tinted plush morning-gown, that fell round her slender figure in long straight folds, made her look taller and thinner than usual. Certainly her face was worn, and her eyelids were reddened as if from weeping or sleeplessness.

"Lesley ! my darling ! have you come back to me ?"

She folded the girl in her arms and pressed her lips to the soft cheek, a little sob breaking from her as she spoke.

"Only for half an hour, mamma. Just to speak to you for a few minutes about *him*."

"Him ! Your father ! Oh, Lesley, what does it all mean ?"

"Poor mamma ! it must have been a great shock to you. Sit down, and I will tell you all that I know."

And gently pressing Lady Alice back into a seat, Lesley took a footstool at her mother's knee and told her the story. Lady Alice listened in silence. With one hand she stroked Lesley's hair ; with the other she held Lesley's fingers, and Lesley noticed that it twitched from time to time as if in nervous agitation. Otherwise, however, she was very calm.

"And so," she said, at last, "you came to tell me the story as you know it. . . But, my child, you have told me



very little that I did not know already. Even in last night papers the relationship between Oliver Trent and these people in Whitechapel was commented on. And your own name, my darling—that did not escape. Did you think I should misunderstand you?"

"Oh, no, mamma—not misunderstand *me*, but I was afraid lest you might misunderstand some one else."

Lady Alice was silent.

"I was afraid," said Lesley, softly, "lest the years that have gone by should have made you forget his gentleness and nobleness of soul—lest for one moment you should think him capable of a mean or vile action. I came to tell you, dearest mother, how impossible it was for us—who *know* him—to credit for one moment an accusation of this kind. If all the world said that he was guilty, you and I, mamma, would know that he was not."

"My child, my darling, you must speak for yourself. Do not try to speak for me!"

"Mother, won't you give me a message for him?"

"Are you going to see him, Lesley?"

"I hope so. Mr. Kenyon said he would take me."

There was a short silence, and then Lesley lifted her eyes to her mother's face. She was not encouraged by what she saw there. It was pale, sad, immobile, and, as it seemed to Lesley, very cold.

"Mother, I must go. Won't you send him a message?"

"I have no message, Lesley."

"Not one little word?"

"Not one." And then, as if trying to excuse herself Lady Alice added, hurriedly, "there is nothing that I can say which would please him. He would not care for any message from me."

"He would care to hear that you trusted him!"

"I do not think so," said Lady Alice, with a little shake of her head.

Lesley rose to her feet, silenced for the moment, but not altogether vanquished. She put her arms round her mother's neck.

"But you do trust him, mamma? Tell me that, at any rate."

For almost the first time within Lesley's memory Lady Alice made a gesture of impatience.

"I cannot be catechised, Lesley. Let me alone. You do not understand."

And Lesley was obliged to go away, feeling sorrowfully that she had failed in her mission. Perhaps, however, she had succeeded better than she knew.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## "AT YOUR SIDE."

CASPAR BROOKE was not as yet debarred the privilege of seeing his friends, and on the morning after his arrest he had a great many visitors, including, of course, Maurice Kenyon and his lawyer. Maurice was busying himself earnestly on his friend's behalf; and, considering the position that Brooke held, the esteem felt for him in high places, and the amount of interest that was being brought to bear on the authorities, there was little doubt but that he would be let out on bail in a day or two, even if the proceedings were not quashed altogether. Some delay, however, there was sure to be owing to the pertinacity of Mary Trent's assertion that she saw him struggling with Oliver on the stairs, but in the meantime his detention was allowed to press as lightly upon him as possible.

It was noon before Lesley saw him, and when she sprang to his side and threw her arms around his neck, with a new demonstrativeness of manner, she noticed that his brows lifted a little, and that he smiled with a look of positive pleasure and relief.

"So you have come?" he said, holding her to him as if he did not like to let her go. "I began to wonder if you had deserted me!"

"Oh, father! Why, I have been waiting ever so long for Mr. Grierson to go."

"And before that——?" he asked, in rather a peculiar tone.

"Before that—I went to see mamma." And Lesley looked bravely up into his face.

"That was an infringement of contract, as I suppose you know," said Caspar, smiling persistently. "But it does not matter very much. What did 'mamma' say to you?"

"I—don't—know," murmured Lesley, confused by the question. "Nothing very much."

"Nothing. Ah, I know what that means. He turned away from her, and, sitting down, leaned his elbows upon a table, and played with his beard. "It was useless, Lesley," he said, quietly, after a few minutes' silence. "Your mother is the last person whose sympathies will be enlisted on my side."

Lesley tried to speak but suddenly felt her voice fail her; so instead of speaking she knelt down by her father, leaned her head upon his shoulder, and burst into very heartfelt tears.

"Little one," said Caspar, "I'm afraid we have both got ourselves into a mess."

It did not sound comforting, but Lesley stayed her tears to listen.

"I have been talking to Grierson," her father continued, "and we have agreed that there must be no suppression of the truth. My dislike to Oliver Trent has been commented on already, and I must give a reason for it. Lesley, my dear, you will have to contribute your own evidence as to the reason."

Lesley looked up with terrified, wide-open eyes. "Do you mean that I shall have to say——"

"You will have to go into the witness-box and tell what you know, or rather answer the questions that are asked you."

"But will that be—best—for you?" She put the question with some difficulty.

"That is not the point. What we have to do is to tell the truth, and leave the result to others."

"—To God?" Lesley interposed, almost involuntarily. Caspar Brooke's lip moved with a grave smile.

"Well, yes, to God if you will have it so—we use different terms, but perhaps we have the same meaning. We must at any rate leave the result to the working of various laws which we cannot control, and to fight against these laws of nature is wrong-doing—or sin. Therefore, Lesley, you will have to tell the truth, whether it may seem to be for my good or my harm."

She glanced at him rather piteously, and her eyes filled with tears. Aunt Sophy's words recurred to her mind; but they seemed feeble and futile in the light of his courage and steadfastness. Aunt Sophy had been wrong—so much

was clear to Lesley ; and truth was best under all possible circumstances.

"It is for Ethel I am sorry," she murmured.

"Yes, poor Ethel. It is true then—what that woman said—that Oliver Trent was in love with you?"

"I could not help it, father. I don't think it was my fault. I did not know till it was too late."

"I am not blaming you, my dear. When I came into the drawing-room that day—do you remember?—what had happened then? Can you bear to tell me?"

She hid her face on his shoulder as she answered, "He was speaking foolishly. I think he wanted to—to kiss me . . . I was very glad that you came in."

"Was that the first time?"

"Yes, the first. And I did not even see him again until that Saturday night, when he found me in the study—and —"

"And asked you to run away with him?"

"Yes. Indeed, I had not led him to think that I would do any such thing, father. I told him never to speak to me again. If it had not been for Ethel's sake, I think I should have called someone—but I did not like to make a disturbance."

"No, dear, no. And you—yourself—you did not care for him?"

"Oh no, no, no!"

"It has been a terrible tangle—and the knot has been cut very rudely," said Mr. Brooke, in a musing tone. "Of one thing I am quite certain, we were not fit to have the care of you, Lesley—your aunt and I. You would never have been in this position, my poor child, if we had looked after you."

"It isn't *that* which troubles me," said Lesley, trying to steady her voice. "It is—that you have to bear the brunt of it all. If it had not been for me you would never have been here. It has been my fault!"

"Not your fault, child," said her father. "The fault did not lie with you, but with that unfortunate young man, for whom I am truly sorry. Don't be morbid, Lesley; look things straight in the face, and don't blame yourself unless you are perfectly sure that you deserve to be blamed."

And there the conference ended, for Miss Brooke arrived at that moment, and Lesley thought it advisable to

leave the choice of a subject of conversation in her hands. Caspar had many visitors that day, and many letters of advice and condolence, for few men were blessed—or cursed—with as many friends as he. Among the letters that reached him was a note without signature, which he read hastily, and as hastily concealed when he had read it. This note was written in uneven, crooked characters, as if the writer's hand had shaken as she wrote, and ran as follows:—

“I ought not to write, but how can I keep silence? There is nothing that I am not capable of bearing for my friends. If you will but confide in me—I am ready to do, to bear, to suffer anything—to forgive anything. Let me see you: I can then speak more freely. If you should be set at liberty in a day or two, I shall hear. You can then come to me: if not, I will come to you. But you need have no fear for me: I shall take means to prevent recognition.”

The envelope was plain and of common texture; but the note-paper was hand-made, with a faint, fine odor as of some sweet-smelling Eastern wood, and bore in one corner the letters “R. R.,” intertwined in deep blue tints. There was no doubt in Caspar's mind as to the person from whom it came.

He received it about three o'clock in the afternoon. If he wished to decline the proposed interview, he knew that he must write at once. In his heart he knew also that it would be better for him and better for her that the interview should be declined. What had he to do with Rosalind Romaine? He was accused of murdering her brother: it was not seemly that she should see him—even although the world were not to know of the visit. The world would know sooner or later—that was the worst of it: ultimately, the world knows everything. But why should she wish to see him? Had she information to impart? If she had, it would be foolish, from merely conventional reasons, to refuse her admittance, supposing that she really wished to come. And in a day or two at most he would certainly be able to go, if necessary, to her.

But the fact was, he did not believe that she had any information to impart. She did not say so. Probably she only wished to express her faith in him, and to assure him of her friendship. Rosalind had been his friend through

many a long year. She had always shown herself kind and sympathetic—in spite of one or two interludes of coldness and general oddity which Caspar had never felt able to understand. It would be pleasant enough to hear her say that she trusted him—he could not help feeling that. For, although he had passed the matter off very lightly when talking to Lesley, he was secretly hurt at the absence of any message from his wife. He could almost have worked himself into a rage at the thought of it. “Does she, too, think me guilty?” he asked himself. “She ought to know me better, although she does not love me! She ought to know. And she does know, but she is too cold and too proud to say so. Poor, warm-hearted Lesley has tried to win her sympathy for me and failed. Well, I never expected otherwise: she never gave me what I wanted—sympathy, understanding, or love! And how can she blame me”—the thought stole unawares into his mind—“if I turn for sympathy to one who offers it?”

Yes, Rosalind would sympathize, and there would be no harm in listening to her gentle words. He had the pen in his hand, paper and ink before him: a word would be enough, if he wished to stay her visit. But he would not write it: if she liked to come, she might come—he would be glad to see her. Besides, her letter wanted explanation: for what had she to forgive?

He pushed the writing materials away from him, and went to the fireplace, where a small fire was burning very dimly. The day was cloudy, and the afternoon was drawing in. He crushed the coal with the heel of his boot in order to make a flame leap up; then leaned his elbow on the narrow mantelpiece and gazed down into the glowing embers.

The door opened and closed again behind him, but at first he did not look up. He thought that the attendant had come to light the gas or bring him some tea. But when he heard no further sound, he suddenly stirred and looked up; and in the dim light he saw beside him the figure of a woman, cloaked and veiled.

Was it Rosalind? No, it was too tall for Rosalind Romaine. Not Lesley?—though it had a look of her! And then his heart gave a tremendous leap (although no one would have suspected it, for his massive form and bearded face remained as motionless and calm as ever), for it

dawned upon him that the visitor was none other than Lesley's mother, his wife, Alice Brooke, who had quitted him in anger twelve years before.

"I beg your pardon," he said, courteously. "I did not see—I had no idea who it was. Will you not sit down?"

He handed her a chair, with a bow as formal as that of a complete stranger. Perhaps the formality was inevitable. Lady Alice put her hand on the back of the chair, and felt that she was trembling.

"I hope I am not intruding," she said, in a voice as formal as his own.

"Not at all. It was most kind of you to come. Pray sit down."

She seated herself in silence, and then put up her veil. He remained standing, and for a moment or two the husband and wife looked each other steadily in the face, with a sort of curiosity and with a sort of wonder too. The years had not dealt unkindly with either of them. Lady Alice had kept her slender grace of figure and her gentleness of expression, but the traces of sorrow and anxiety were so visible upon her delicate face that Caspar felt a sudden impulse of pity towards the woman who had suffered in her loneliness more than he had perhaps thought possible. As she sat and looked at him, a certain pathetic quality showing itself with more than usual vividness in her soft eyes and drooping mouth, he was conscious of a desire to take her in his arms and console her for all the past. But he caught back the impulse with an inward laugh of scorn. She had no doubt come to run needles into him, as she used to do in those unlucky days of poverty and struggle. She had a knack of looking pretty and sweet while she was doing it, he remembered. It would not do to show any weakness now.

And she—what did she think of him? She was less absorbed with the consideration of any change in him than with what she intended to say. What impressed her most were the inflections of his quiet, musical voice—a voice as unroughened and as gentle as when it wooed her in her father's Northern Castle years before! She had forgotten its power, but it made her tremble now from head to foot with a sort of terror that was not without charm. It was so cold a voice—so cold and calm! She felt that if it once grew tender and caressing her strength would fail her alto-



gether. But there was not much fear of tenderness from him—to her.

After that involuntary and rather awkward pause, Lady Alice recollected herself, and spoke first.

"You must be very much surprised to see me?"

"I am delighted, of course. I could wish"—with a slight smile—"that the apartment was more worthy of you, and that the circumstances were less disagreeable; but I am unfortunately not able to alter these details."

"And it is exactly to these details that you owe my visit," said Lady Alice, with unexpected calmness.

"Then I ought to be grateful to them, no doubt."

She moved uneasily, as if the studied conventionality of his tone jarred on her a little; and then she said, with an effort that made her words sound brusque,

"I mean that under ordinary circumstances I should not have come to see you. But these are so strange—so extraordinary—that you will perhaps pardon the intrusion. I felt—on reflection—that it was only right for me to come—to express——"

She faltered, and he took advantage of her hesitation to say, with a quiet smile—

"I am very much obliged to you. But you should not have taken all this trouble. A note would have answered the purpose just as well. I suppose you wish to express your indignation at the little care I seem to have taken of Lesley. You cannot blame me more severely than I blame myself. If she had been under your care I have no doubt we should not be in our present dilemma; but it is no use fretting over what is past—or inevitable. I can only say that I am exceedingly sorry. Will you not loosen your cloak? This room is rather warm. I can't very well ring for tea, I am afraid. You should call on me at Woburn Place, if you want tea."

She loosened her cloak a little at the throat as he suggested. She had taken off her gloves, and he could see that her slender white hands were trembling. Somehow it occurred to him that he had spoken unkindly—but he did not know how or why. His words were commonplace enough. But it was his tone that had been cruel.

"I did not come to make any reproaches or complaints," she said at last, in a low voice.

"No. That was very good of you. I have to thank you, then, for your forbearance."

There was still coldness, still something perilously like scorn, in his tone. It was unbearable to Lady Alice.

"Why do you talk in that way?" she broke out, suddenly. "I came to say something quite different; and you speak as if you wanted to taunt me—to insult me—to hurt me in every possible way? I do not understand what you mean."

"You never did," said Caspar. The scorn had gone now, and the voice had grown stern. "It is useless for us to talk together at all. You have made intercourse impossible. I have no desire to hurt or taunt or insult you, as you phrase it; but, if I am to speak the truth, I must say that I feel very strongly that it is to *you* and *your* behavior that we owe the greater part of this trouble. If you had been at my side, if Lesley had been under a mother's wing, sheltered as only a mother could shelter her, there never would have been an opportunity for that man Trent's clandestine approaches, which will put a stigma on that poor child for the rest of her life, and may—for aught I know—endanger my own neck! I could put up with the loss and harm to myself; but once and for all let me say to you, Alice, that you have neglected your duty as a mother as much as I have neglected mine as a father; and that if you had been in your proper place all this ruin and disgrace and misery might never have come about."

The broken and vehement tones of his voice showed that his feelings were powerfully affected. Lady Alice listened in perfect silence, and kept silence for some minutes after the conclusion of his speech. Caspar, leaning with one shoulder against the mantelpiece, looked frowningly before him, as if he were unconscious of the fact that she had taken her handkerchief out of her muff, and was pressing it to her cheeks and eyes. But in reality he was painfully alive to every one of her movements, and expected a plaintive rejoinder to his accusations. But none came. The silence irritated him, as it had formerly irritated him with Lesley. He was obliged at last to ask a question.

"Since you say you did not come to reproach me, may I ask the motive of your visit?" he asked.

"I scarcely think that it is of any use to tell you now," said his wife, quietly. She had got rid of her tears now,

and had put her handkerchief away. "I had a sort of fancy that you might like me to tell you with my own lips something that I felt rather strongly, but you would probably resent it—and it is only a trifle after all."

She rose from her chair and drew her fur-lined cloak closely round her, as if preparing to depart.

"I should like to hear it—if I am not troubling you too much," said Caspar.

She averted her eyes and began slowly to draw on her gloves. "It is really nothing—I came on a momentary impulse. I have not seen you for a good many years, and we parted with very angry words on our lips, did we not?—but I wanted to say that—although you were sometimes angry—I never knew you do a cruel thing—you were always kind—kindest of all to creatures that were weak (except, perhaps to me); and I am quite sure—sure as that I stand here—that you never did the thing of which they are accusing you. There!"—and she looked straight into his face—"it is a little thing, no doubt: you have hosts of friends to say the same thing to you: but my tribute is worth having, perhaps, because, after all, I am your wife—and in some ways I do understand!"

Caspar's face worked strangely: he bit his lip hard as he looked at her.

"You are generous, Alice," he said, in a low voice, after a pause that seemed eternal to her.

"Oh, no. Why should you call it generous? I only wanted to say this—and also—that if I can be of any use to you now, I am ready. A little thing sometimes turns the course of public opinion. If I were to go to Woburn Place—to stay with Lesley, for instance—so that all the world could see that I believed in you——"

"But—I shall be at Woburn Place myself in a day or two, on bail; and then——"

"I could stay," said Lady Alice, again looking at him. Then her eyes dropped and the color mounted to her forehead. He made a sudden step towards her.

"Alice—is it possible—after all these years——"

"No, it is not possible," she said, with a little laugh which yet had something in it of a sob, "and I don't think we should ever get on together—and I don't love you at all, except for Lesley's sake—but, just until this horrible affair is over, if I might show everybody that I

have all possible faith in you, and that I know you to be good and upright and honorable—just till then, Caspar, I *should* like to be at your side.”

But whether Caspar heard the whole of this speech must remain for ever doubtful, as, long before its close, he had taken her in his arms and was sealing the past between them with a long kiss which might verily be called the kiss of peace.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## "OUT ON BAIL."

MISS BROOKE was electrified. Such a thing had never occurred to her as possible. After years of separation, of dispute, of ill-feeling on either side, here was Lady Alice appearing in her husband's house, and expressing a desire to remain in it. She came to Woburn Place on the evening after her interview with Caspar, and at once made known her wishes to Doctor Sophy.

It was a curious interview. Miss Brooke sat bolt upright on a sofa, with an air of repressed indignation which was exceedingly striking: Lady Alice, half enveloped in soft black furs, was leaning back in the lowest and most luxurious chair the room afforded, with rather more the air of the *grande dame* than she actually wished to convey. In reality her heart was very soft, and there was moisture in her eyes; but it was difficult for her to shake off an appearance of cold indifference to all the world when Miss Sophia Brooke, M.D., was in her society. She had never understood Doctor Sophy, and Miss Brooke had always detested her.

"Am I to understand, Lady Alice," said the spinster, in her stiffest voice, "that my brother wishes you to take up your abode in this house during his absence?"

"Yes, I think so," said Lady Alice, equably. "He has wished me to take up my abode here for some time past."

"Indeed?"

The note of incredulity in her voice angered Caspar's wife.

"I think you hardly understand," she said with some quiet dignity, "that I have been to see Mr. Brooke this afternoon. Strange circumstances demand new treatment, Miss Brooke. I consulted with my husband as to what we had better do, and he agreed with me that it would be better for Lesley if I came here—at any rate for the present."

"Better for Lesley!" Miss Brooke was evidently offended. "I do not think that you need put yourself to any inconvenience—even for Lesley's sake. I will take care of her."

"But I happen to be her mother," said Lady Alice, with a touch of amusement. It struck her as odd that Miss Brooke only amused her now, and did not make her angry at all. "And we have the world to think of, besides."

"I scarcely thought you troubled yourself very much about what the world said," remarked Aunt Sophy, severely. "It has said a good deal during the last ten or twelve years."

"At least it shall not say," responded Lady Alice, "that I believe my husband guilty of murder. I have come back to prevent *that*."

Miss Brooke looked at her doubtfully. She was not a person of very quick perceptions.

"You mean," she said at last, "that you have come back—because——"

"*Because* he was accused of murder," said Lady Alice, clearly, "and I choose to show the world that I do not believe it."

And Lesley, entering from the library, heard the words, and stood transfixed for a moment with pure delight. Then she sprang forward, fell on her knees before her mother, and embraced her with such fervor that Miss Brooke put up her eye-glasses and gazed in surprise.

"Mother! my own dearest mother! You do believe in him, then! and you have come to show us that you do! Oh! how delighted he will be when he knows!"

A little color showed itself in Lady Alice's delicate face. "He does know," she whispered, almost with the coyness of a girl.

"And he *was* delighted, was he not? It would be such a comfort to him—just now when he wants every kind of comfort. Oh, mamma, it is so good of you, and I am so glad. Aunty Sophy, aren't you glad, too?"

Lady Alice tried to stifle this naïve utterance, but it would not be repressed, and Aunt Sophy had to rise to the occasion as best she could. With rather a grim face, she rose from her seat upon the sofa and advanced towards her brother's wife, holding out a very reluctant hand.

"I appreciate your motives, Lady Alice, and I see that your conduct may be of service to my brother." Then she

relapsed into a more colloquial tone. "But how on earth you mean to live in this part of London, I'm sure I can't imagine. No doubt it seems rather smoky and grimy to you after Mayfair and Belgravia."

"London is generally a little smoky," said Lady Alice, smiling in spite of herself. "Thank you, Sophy: I thought you would do me justice."

And the hands of the two women met in a friendlier grasp than ever in the days of yore.

"I must see about your room," said Miss Brooke, practically. It was her way of holding out the olive branch. "You would like to be near Lesley, I suppose. We shall try to make you comfortable, but, of course, you won't expect the luxuries of your own home here."

"I shall be very comfortable, I am sure," said Lady Alice.

"What does she mean by talking in that tone?" cried Lesley, hotly, when Doctor Sophy had left the room. "It was almost insulting!"

"No, my darling, no. It is only a memory of old times when I was—exacting and dissatisfied. Yes, I see that I must have seemed so, then. I had not had much experience in those days; and then your father was not a man of substance as he seems to be now," said Lady Alice, inspecting the room, with a half-smile. The smile died quickly away, however, and was succeeded by a sad look and a sigh. "Ah, poor Caspar!"

"He will be home in a day or two. Everybody says so."

"I trust so, dearest. And I will stay with—you till he comes home."

"Oh, but now that you have come, mamma, you will never be allowed to go away again."

"I never said that, Lesley. I have come to maintain a principle, that is all. A wife ought to show that she trusts her husband, if he is falsely accused."

And then Lady Alice lowered her eyes and changed the subject, for it suddenly occurred to her that she had not been very ready, in her younger years, to give the trust that now seemed to be her husband's due.

But she settled down quite naturally in her husband's home during the next few days. Lesley, remembering the discomfort of her own first few weeks, expected her to say

that the house was hideous and the neighborhood detestable. But Lady Alice said nothing of the kind. She thought it a fine old house—well-built and roomy—far preferable, she said, to the places she had often occupied in the West End. With different furniture and a little good taste it might be made absolutely charming. And when she got as far as “absolutely charming,” uttered with her chin pillowed on one hand, and her eyes roving meditatively over the drawing-room mantelpiece, Lesley smiled to herself, and gave up all fear that she would ever go away again. Lady Alice had evidently come to the conclusion that it was her duty to see that Caspar’s house was thoroughly redecorated from top to bottom.

But she did not come to this conclusion all at once. There were days when the minds of mother and daughter were too full of sorrow and anxiety to occupy themselves with upholstery and bric-à-brac. And the day of the adjourned inquest, when Caspar Brooke was allowed to go to his own house on bail, was one of the worst of all.

He came home quietly that afternoon in company with Maurice Kenyon, greeted his family affectionately but with something of a melancholy air, then went at once to his study, where he shut himself up and began to write and read letters. The cloud was hanging over him still. He knew well enough that if he had been a poor man, of no account in the world, he would at that moment have been occupying a prison cell instead of his own comfortable study. For presumption was strong against him; and it had taken a great deal of influence and extraordinarily high bail to secure his release. At present he stood committed to take his trial for manslaughter within a very short space of time. And nobody had succeeded, or seemed likely to succeed, in throwing any doubt on the testimony of Mary Trent. He was certainly in a very awkward position: it might be a very terrible position by-and-bye.

He was aroused from the reverie into which he had fallen by the entry of a servant with a note. He opened it, read the contents slowly, and then put it into the fire. He stood frowning a little as he watched it burn.

After a few moments of this hesitation he rang the bell, told Sarah that he was going out, and left the house. The three women in the drawing-room upstairs, already nervous and overstrained from long suspense, all started when the



reverberation of *that* closing door made itself heard. Lesley felt her mother's hand close on hers with a quick, convulsive pressure. She looked up.

"He has gone out!" Lady Alice murmured, so that Lesley alone could hear. "He does not come—to *us*!"

Lesley did not know what to say. She was surprised to find that her mother expected him to come. But then she was only Caspar Brooke's daughter and not his wife.

Lady Alice lay back in her chair, closed her eyes and waited. She had once been a jealous woman: there were the seeds of jealousy in her still. She sat and wondered whether Caspar had gone for sympathy and comfort to any other woman. And after wondering this for half an hour it suddenly occurred to her mind with the vividness of a lightning flash that if things *were* so—if her husband *had* found sympathy elsewhere—it was her own fault. She had no right to accuse him, or to blame him, when she had left him for a dozen years.

"I have no right to blame him, perhaps, but I have still a right to know," she said to herself. And then, disengaging her hand from Lesley's clinging fingers, she rose and went downstairs—down to the study which she had so seldom visited. She seated herself in Caspar's arm-chair, and prepared to wait there for his return. Surely he would not be long!—and then she would speak to him, and things should be made clear.

Caspar's note had been written by Mrs. Romaine. It was quite formal, and merely contained a request that he would call on her at his earliest convenience. And he complied at once, as she had surmised that he would do. Her confidential maid opened the door to him, and conducted him to the drawing-room. It was dusk, and the blinds were drawn down. Oliver Trent's funeral had taken place the day before.

Mr. Brooke did not sit down. He knew that the interview which was about to take place was likely to be a painful one, but he could not guess in the least what kind of turn it would take. Did Rosalind believe in his guilt? Did she know what manner of man her brother Oliver had been? Was she going to reproach or to condole? She had done a strange thing in asking him to the house at all, and at another time he might have thought it wiser not to accede to her request; but he was in the mood in which

the most extraordinary incidents seem possible, and scarcely anything could have seemed to him too bizarre to happen. He felt curiously impatient of the ordinary conventionalities of civilized life. Since this miraculous thing had come to pass—that he, Caspar Brooke, a respectable, sane, healthy-minded man of middle-age, could be accused of killing a miserable young scamp like Oliver Trent in a moment of passion—the world had certainly seemed somewhat crazy and out of joint. It was not worth while to stand very much on ceremony at such a conjuncture; and if Rosalind Romaine wanted to talk to him about her dead brother, he was willing to go and hear her talk. And yet as he stood in her dainty little drawing-room, it came over him very strongly that he ought not to be there.

He was still musing when the door opened, and Rosalind stole into the room. He did not hear her until she was close upon him, and then he turned with a sudden start. She looked different—she was changed. Her face was very pale: her eyelids were reddened: she was dressed in the deepest black, and over her head she had flung a black lace veil, which gave her—perhaps unintentionally—a tragic look. She held the folds together with her right hand, and spoke to him quietly.

"It was kind of you to come," she said.

"You summoned me. I should not have come without that," he answered, quickly.

"No, I suppose not. And of course—in the ordinary course of things—I ought not to have summoned you. The world would say that I was wrong. But we have been old friends for many years now, have we not?"

"I always thought so," he answered, gravely. "But now—I fear——"

"You mean"—with a strange vibration in her voice—"you mean that we must never be friends again—because—because of Oliver——"

"This accusation must naturally tend to separate the families," he said, in a very calm, grave voice. "Even when it is disproved, we shall not find it easy to resume old relations. I am very sorry for it, Rosalind, just as I need not tell you how sorry I am for the cause——"

She interrupted him hurriedly. "Yes, yes, I know all that; but you speak of *disproving* the charge. Can you do that?"

He was silent for a moment. "I shall do my best," he said at length, with some emotion in his voice.

"And if it is not disproved—what then?" she asked. "Suppose they call it *murder*?"

Caspar drew himself up: a certain displeasure began to mark itself upon his features.

"Need you ask me?"

"Yes, I need. I want you to consider the answer that you would give. I have a reason."

Her eager eyes, hot and burning in a face that was strangely white, pled for her. Caspar relented a little, but bent his brows as he replied—

"The extreme penalty of the law, I suppose. It is absurd—but, of course, it is possible. It is not a case in which I should expect penal servitude for life to be substituted, supposing that I were found guilty. But I fail to see your motive for asking what must be to me a rather painful question."

"Oh, you are strong! You can bear it!" she said, dropping her face upon her hands. Caspar gazed at her in amazement. He began to wonder whether she were going out of her mind. But before he could find any word of calming or consoling tendency, she flung down her hands and spoke again. "I want you to fix your mind on it for a moment, even although it hurts you," she said. "You are a strong man—you do not shrink from a thing because it is a little painful. Think what it would mean for yourself, and not for yourself only; for your friends, for those who love you! A perpetual disgrace—a misery!"

"You seem anxious to assume that I shall be convicted," he said, still with displeasure.

"I tell you I am doing so on purpose. I want you to think of it. You know—you know as well as I do—that the chances are against you!"

"And if they are?"

"If they are—why do you incur such a risk!"

"Mrs. Romaine," said Caspar, gently, but with a steady coldness of tone, of which she did not at first feel the import, "I think you hardly know the force of what you are saying. I do not incur any risk unnecessarily or wantonly: I only wish the truth to be made known. What can I do more—or less?"

"You could go away," she said, almost in a whisper.

If the room had been lighter, she might, perhaps, have seen the frown that was gathering on his brow, the wrath that darkened his eyes as he spoke; but his face was in shadow, and for a moment anger made him speechless. She went on eagerly, breathlessly, without waiting for a reply.

"You might get off quite easily to—to Spain, perhaps, or some place where there was no extradition treaty. You are out on bail, I know; but your friends could not complain. Surely it is a natural enough thing for a man, situated as you are, to wish to escape: nobody would blame you in the long run—they would only say that you were wise. And if you stay, everything is against you. You had so much better take your present chance!"

Caspar muttered something inarticulate, then seemed to choke back further utterance, and kept silence for a minute. When he spoke it was in a curiously tranquil tone.

"You do not seem to have heard of the quality that men call their honor?"

"Oh, honor! I have heard enough about honor," she answered with a nervous, rasping laugh. "And you—you to talk about honor—after—after *what you have done!*"

Caspar Brooke fell back a step or two and surveyed her curiously. "God God!" The exclamation broke from him, as if against his will. "You speak as though you thought I was guilty—as though I had—*murdered* Oliver!"

And she, looking at him as intently as he looked at her, said only, in the simplest possible way—

"And did you not?"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## LOVE OR TRUST.

CASPAR turned away. For a moment he felt mortally sick, as if from a pang of acute physical pain. Distrust from an old friend is always a hard thing to bear. And so, for a moment or two, he did not speak.

"I was not surprised," said Mrs. Romaine, quickly. "I had been looking for something of the kind. I won't say that you were not justified—in a certain sense. Oliver acted abominably, I know. He told me what he was going to do beforehand."

"Told you what he was going to do?"

"Yes—to make Lesley fall in love with him. He did not mean to marry her. He meant to gain her affections and then to—to—leave her, to break her heart. I suppose that is what you found out. I do not wonder that you were surprised."

"No doubt you have good authority for what you are saying," said Mr. Brooke, very coldly, "but your account does not tally with what I have gathered from other sources."

"From Lesley herself?"

Caspar bowed his head. He was conscious of a violent dislike to bringing Lesley's name into the discussion. Mrs. Romaine went on rapidly.

"As to Lesley, of course I cannot say. I don't know whether he failed or succeeded. Oliver very seldom failed with women when he tried. But, of course, he was going to marry Ethel; and that meant that if he *had* succeeded Lesley had been thrown over. It is not like me to put things so baldly, is it? I see that I disgust you. But I do not know that I need apologize. You are man of the world enough to understand that at certain crises we are obliged to speak our minds, to face the truth boldly and see what it means. Is it not so?"

"It may be so, but I am not aware that the present crisis demands such plain speaking."

"Then you must be blind," said his hearer, with a burst of indignation, "blind—blind—*blind*! Or mad? is that it? What sort of crisis do you expect? What can be worse than the present state of things? Are not your life and her character at stake? Why do you not take your present opportunity and save her and yourself? Look the matter in the face and decide?"

"I would rather not discuss it," said Caspar. "The course you indicate is not one that could be taken by any honorable man. It is—it is—absurd." The last word was evidently the substitute for a much stronger one in his mind. "I see no use in talking about the matter. We are only giving ourselves useless pain."

There was a short silence. Mrs. Romaine drew her veil more tightly round her face, and seemed to deliberate. Caspar threw a longing glance—which she intercepted—towards the door.

"Men are such cowards," she said at last, in a low and bitter tone. "I have proved *that* in every way: I ought to be prepared for cowardice—even from you. They want to slip out of every unpleasant position, and leave some woman to bear the brunt of it. You, for instance, want to go now, this minute, because I have said one or two things that pain you. You don't care enough for what I think to make you wish to alter my opinion—to fight it out and conquer me; you only want to get away and leave me to 'cool down,' as you would call it. You are mistaken. I am not speaking from any momentary irritation: what I say to you to-day is the result of long thought, long consideration, long patience. It would be better for you to have the courage and the manliness to listen to me."

"You talk in a very extraordinary way, Rosalind," said Caspar. "I do not understand it, and I fail to see its justice towards me. I have never refused to listen to you, have I? As for cowardice—it seemed to me that you were trying to persuade me to do a very cowardly thing just now; but perhaps I was mistaken. I will hear all that you have to say: if I was anxious to go, it was only that I might save you from tiring or hurting yourself."

"It matters so much whether I am tired or hurt, does it not?" she said, with the faintest possible flicker of a smile on her white lips. "That is what you all think of—whether one suffers—suffers physically. It is my soul that is hurt,

my heart that is tired—but you don't concern yourself with that sort of thing."

"I assure you that I am very sorry——," he began, and then he stopped short. She had made it very difficult for him to say anything so commonplace, and yet so true.

"If you are sorry," she said, in a softer tone, "and if you want to make me happier—*save yourself*."

"No," said Caspar, roughly—almost violently—"by Heaven, I won't do that."

"You don't wish to save yourself?"

"Not at that price—the price of my honor."

"Listen to me," she said, drawing nearer to him and speaking very softly. "I have made it my business during the last day or two—when I gathered that you would be let out on bail—to collect all the information that might be useful to you. You could get away to-morrow or next day by a vessel that leaves Southampton at the time I have marked on this paper. It is not an ordinary steamer—not a passenger-ship at all—and no one will know that you are on board. It would take you to Oporto. You would be safe enough in the interior—a friend of mine who went there once told me that there were charming palaces and half-ruined castles to let, where one could live as in paradise, amidst the loveliest gardens, full of fountains and birds and flowers."

Her voice took on a caressing tone, as if she were dreaming of perfect happiness. "How like a woman," thought Caspar to himself, "to think only of the material side of life?" Then he corrected himself: "Like some women: not like all, thank God!"

"So you would condemn me to exile and loneliness as well as to dishonor?" he said. It was as much as he could do not to laugh outright at the chimerical idea.

"It is no exile to a cosmopolitan like yourself to live out of England," she answered, scornfully. "As to dishonor—what will you not have to suffer if you stay in England? Where is your reputation now? And as to loneliness—don't you know—do you not see—that you need need not go—alone?"

She put her left hand gently on his arm, and for a moment there was silence in the room. Her heart beat so loudly that she was afraid of his hearing it. But she need not have feared; his mind was far too much occupied with

more important matters to be able to take cognizance of such a detail as the state of Mrs. Romaine's pulse.

His first impulse was one of intense indignation and anger. His second was one of pity. These feelings alternated in him when at last he forced himself to speak. Which of the two predominated he hardly knew. Perhaps pity: because it drove him, almost as a matter of self-respect, to make a pretence of not knowing what she meant.

"Anything is exile to a man who leaves his home," he said sternly. "To a man who leaves his wife and daughter—do you understand? As for the dishonor of such a course, it seems as if you could not comprehend that: my feelings on the subject are evidently beyond your ken. But you can understand this—first, that I should go nowhere into no exile, into no new home, without my wife; and, secondly, that *she*, at least, trusts me—*she* knows that I have not your brother's blood upon my hands."

Rosalind's fingers had slipped from his arm when he began to speak: she knew that if she had not removed them then they would have been shaken off. He could see them amongst the folds of black lace at her breast—clutching, tearing, as if she had not room to breathe.

"Your wife!" she said, with a gasp. "I did not know. . . . She has been beforehand with me, then! And it is she—she—that you will take—to Spain?"

"There is no question of Spain. I mean to stay here in England and fight the matter out. My wife would be the first person to tell me so. I cannot imagine her speaking to me again if I were coward enough to run away."

"She would not do for you what I have done!" cried the unhappy woman, now, as it seemed, beside herself. "If she believes you innocent, so much the easier for her! But I—I—believe you guilty—yes, Caspar Brooke, I believe that you killed my brother—and I do not care! I loved him, yes; but I love you—*you*—a thousand times more!"

"You do not know what you are saying. You are mad. Be silent, Rosalind," said Caspar Brooke, in a deep tone of anger. But she raved on.

"Have I not been silent for years? And who is as faithful to you as I have been? It is easy to love a man



who is innocent ; but not a man who is guilty ! Guilty or not—I do not care. It is you that I care for—and you may have as many sins as you please upon your soul—but they are nothing to me. I am past anything now but speaking the truth. Have you no pity for a woman to whom you are dearer than her own soul ? ”

She would have thrown herself at his feet, if he had not prevented her. He was touched a little by her suffering, but he was also immeasurably angered and disgusted. An exhibition of uncontrolled feeling was not the way to charm him. His one desire now became the desire to escape.

“ I should have no pity,” he said, gravely, “ for my own selfishness and cowardice, if I took advantage of this moment of weakness on your part. It *is* weakness, I hope—I will not call it by any other name. You will recover from it when the stress of this painful time is over, and you will be glad to forget it as I shall do. Believe me, I will not think of it again. It shall be in my mind as though you had not said it ; and, though it will be impossible for us to continue on our former terms of friendship, I shall always wish for your welfare, and hope that time will bring you happiness and peace.”

She made no answer. She lay where he had placed her, her head buried amongst the cushions, crushed to the very earth. She would not look at him, would not make semblance to have heard. And he, without hesitation, went deliberately to the door and let himself out. He gained the street without being intercepted, and drew a long breath of relief when he felt the soft night air playing on his heated brow. The moralist would have said that he came off victor ; but he had a sense, as he went out along the pavement, of being only a defeated and degraded man. There was not even the excitement of gratified vanity, for an offered love which did not include perfect trust in his honor was an insult in itself. And Caspar Brooke's integrity of soul was dear to him.

It was perhaps impossible for him—a mere man—to estimate the extent of suffering to which his scorn had subjected the woman that he left behind. Rosalind remained as he had seen her, crouching on the ground, with her head on the sofa cushions, for full two hours or more. When she rose she went to her own room and lay upon her

bed, refusing for many hours either to eat or to speak. She did not sleep : she lay broad awake all night, recalling every tone of Caspar's voice, and every passing expression of his face. She was bitterly humiliated and ashamed. But she was not ashamed in the sense of shame for wrongdoing : she was only ashamed because he had rebuffed her. She was sick with mortification. She had offered him everything in her power—peace, safety, love : she had offered him *herself* even, and been rejected with scorn. Nothing crushes a woman like this humiliation. And in some women's natures such an experience will produce dire results ; for loss of self-respect is resented as the worst injury that man can inflict, and is followed by deadly hatred to the man who has inflicted it. It may be argued by the more logical male that the woman has brought it all upon herself ; but no affronted, humiliated, shame-stricken woman will ever allow this to be the fact. The sacrifice she conceives to have been all her own ; but the pain has come from *him*.

This was the way in which Rosalind looked at the matter. And mistaken as she was in her view of the moralities and proprieties of the situation, she suffered an amount of pain which may well arouse in us more pity than Caspar Brooke felt for her. The burning, stinging sense of shame seemed to make her whole soul an open wound. It was intolerable. The only way out of it, she said to herself at first, is to die. There was an old song that rang in her ears continually, as if somebody were repeating it over and over again. She could not remember it all—only a line here and there. "When lovely woman stoops to folly," it began, what art can wash her tears and stains and shame away? And the answer was what Rosalind herself had already given : the only way "to rouse his pity" was "to die!" She almost laughed at herself for repeating the well-worn, hackneyed, century-old ditty. People did not die nowadays, either of broken hearts or of chloral, when their lovers deserted them. And Caspar Brooke had never been her lover. No, he had only given her pain ; and she wished that she could make him suffer, too. "Revenge" was too high-flown a word ; but if she could see him heart-broken, ruined, disgraced, she would be—not satisfied, but she would feel her pain allayed.

Caspar Brooke walked for an hour before he was calm enough to remember that he ought to go home. When this

idea once occurred to him, he felt a pang of shame for his own forgetfulness. What would Alice think of him? And this was the first day that she had been with him in his house for so many years. He must go home and make his apologies. Not that she would expect very much attention from him. Had she not said that she was only trying to do her duty? Probably she disliked him still.

He let himself in with his latch-key, and walked straight into the study. A shaded lamp had been lighted, and but faintly illuminated the corners of the room. But there was light enough for him to see that Lady Alice was sitting in his chair. He came up to the table, and looked at her without speaking. There was a strange tumult of feeling in his heart. He wished that he could tell her how gratified he was by her trust in him, how much he prized the very things that had once irritated him against her—her reserve, her fine perception, her excellent fastidiousness of taste, even that little air of coldness that became her so well. To come into her presence was like entering a fragrant English garden, after stifling for an hour in a conservatory where the air was heavy with the perfume of stephanotis.

She rose, as he continued silent, and stood on the rug, almost face to face with him. She did not find it easy to speak, and there was something in his air which frightened her a little. She made a trivial remark at last, but with great difficulty.

"You have been away a long time," she said.

She was not prepared for the answer. He put out his hand and drew her close to him. "You were away a great deal longer," he said, looking down at her fair, serious face. She could not reply. "Twelve years, is it not?" he went on. "That's a long time out of one's life, Alice. I feel myself an old man now."

"No, no, Caspar!" she said, tremulously.

"What was it all about, Alice? You know I never really understood it. Can't you make me understand? Was it that I was simply unbearable? too disagreeable to be put up with any longer?"

"No, it was not that. I will speak the truth now, Caspar. I was jealous—I thought you cared for Rosalind Romaine."

"But you know now—surely—that that was not true?"

"Could you swear it?" she asked, suddenly and sharply, with a quick look into his face.

For a moment he was annoyed. Then his brow cleared, and he answered, very gravely—

"I can and will, if you like. But I thought—having trusted me so far—that you could trust me without an oath. Alice, I never loved any woman but one: and that one was yourself. Have you been as true to me as I have been to you?"

"I don't think I ever knew that I loved you until now," said Alice, laying her head with a deep sigh upon her husband's breast.

"Love is not enough, though it is a great deal: do you trust me?"

"Implicitly—now that I have looked at you again."

Caspar gave a little laugh.

"Then I must never let you go away from me, or you will begin to disbelieve in me," he said.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## TWELVE SILVER SPOONS.

LADY ALICE was not long in finding out that Maurice Kenyon, her husband's chief friend, was the man of whom Lesley had spoken in her letters, and also the doctor who had interested her at the hospital. She did not speak to Lesley about him: she took a little time to accustom herself to her husband's circle before she made any remarks upon its members. But she was shrewd enough to see very quickly that Mr. Kenyon took even more interest in her daughter than in her husband, and from Lesley's shy looks she fancied that the interest was reciprocated. She had a twinge of regret for her favorite, Harry Duchesne, and then consoled herself by saying that after all Lesley was too young to know her own mind, and that probably she would change before she was twenty-one.

She did not come particularly into contact with Maurice, however, until the Sunday after she had taken up her abode in Woburn Place. And then she saw a good deal of him. For Lesley went to sit with Ethel as was her wont, and Maurice came to dine at Mr. Brooke's. After the early dinner, Lady Alice noticed that there was some parleying between the guest and his host.

"I am going," said Maurice in an urgent undertone. To which Caspar returned a cheerful answer.

"All right, old man; but I am going too." And then Mr. Kenyon knitted his brows and looked vexed.

Caspar at once noted his wife's glance of inquiry. "Has Lesley told you nothing about our Sunday meetings at the Club? We generally betake ourselves to North London on a Sunday afternoon. Mr. Kenyon thinks I had better stay with you, and—I don't."

From Maurice's uncomfortable looks, Lady Alice gathered that there was something doubtful in the proceeding. "Will you let me go with you?" she said, by way of experiment.

There was an exchange of astonished and rather em-

barrassed looks all round. Caspar elevated his eyebrows and clutched his beard: Miss Brooke made a curious sound, something like a snort; and Maurice flushed a deep and dusky red; indications which all annoyed Lady Alice, although she did not quite know what they signified. She rose from her chair and took the matter into her own hands; but all without the slightest change in the manner of graceful indifference which had grown natural to her of late years.

"That is the place where Lesley used to go," she said. "She tells me she sings to the people sometimes. I cannot sing, but I can play the piano a little, if that is any good. Sophy is going, is she not? And I should like to go too."

"There is no reason why you should not," said Mr. Brooke rather abruptly. But the gleam in his eye told of pleasure. "There are some very rough characters at the club sometimes, you know. And perhaps the reception they give me to-day will not be of the pleasantest."

Lady Alice looked at her husband with a mixture of wonder and admiration. The calm way in which he sometimes alluded to his present circumstances, without a trace of bitterness or fretfulness, amazed her. In old days she would have put it down to "good breeding—good manners," some superficial veneer of good society of which she thoroughly approved; but she had seen too much of the seamy side of "good society" now to be able to accept this explanation of his calmness. It was not want of sensitiveness, she was sure of that: he was by no means obtuse: it was simply that his large, strong nature rose above the pettiness of resentment and complaint. The suspicion under which he labored was a grave thing—a trouble, a blow; but it had not made him sour, nor borne him to the earth with a conviction of the injustice of mankind.

His wife looked and marveled, but recollected herself in time to say after only a minute's hesitation:

"I know a little more about rough characters than I once did. We saw a good many at the East End hospital, did we not, Mr. Kenyon?"

It was the first time that she had shown that she remembered Maurice's face. Caspar pricked up his ears.

"*You* at a hospital, Alice? Why, what were you doing there?"

"Visiting some of the patients," she answered, with a little blush.

"Visits which were much appreciated," put in Maurice, "although we found that Lady Alice was too generous."

"Until I was warned by one of the patients that the others abused my kindness and traded on it," said Lady Alice, laughing rather nervously, "and then I drew in a little."

"What patient was that?"

"The name I think was Smith—the man who lost his memory in that curious way."

"Ah yes, I remember." And then Maurice knitted his brows and became very thoughtful: he looked as if a thoroughly new idea had been suggested to him.

Miss Brooke remarked that it was almost time to set out if they were to go to the club that afternoon, and Lady Alice went to her room for her cloak. She was before the looking-glass, apparently studying the reflection of her own face, when a knock at the door, to which she absently said "Come in," was followed by Caspar's entrance. She, thinking that it was her maid, did not look round, and he came behind her without being perceived. The first token of his presence was received by her when his arm was slipped round her waist, and his voice said caressingly and almost playfully in her ear, "I don't know that I want my dainty piece of china carried down into the slums."

"Am I nothing more to you than that?" said Lady Alice reproachfully.

He made no answer, but as he looked at the fair face in the glass, and as their eyes met, she thought that she read a reply in his glance.

"I have been nothing more—I know," she said, with sudden humbleness, "but if it is not too late—if I can make up now for the time I have lost——"

The tears trembled in her eyes, but he kissed them away with new tenderness, saying in a soothing tone—

"We will see, my dear, we will see. I was only in jest."

And she felt that he was thinking not only of the lost years, but of the possible gulf before him—that horror of darkness and disgrace which they might yet have to face.

She went downstairs to the cab that was waiting, with a new and subduing sensation very present to her mind: a

sense of something missed out of her own life, a sense of having failed in the duty that had once been given her to do. Hitherto she had been buoyed up by a certain confidence in her own conscientiousness and power of judgment, as most rather narrow-minded women are; but it now occurred to her that she might have been wrong—not only in a few details, as she had consented to admit—but wrong from beginning to end. She had marred not only her own life but the lives of her husband and her child.

This consciousness kept her very quiet during the drive to Macclesfield Buildings. But nobody spoke much, except Doctor Sophy, who made interjectional remarks, half lost in the rattling of the cab, by way of trying to keep up everybody's spirits. Caspar sitting opposite his wife, with his arms folded and his long legs carefully tucked out of the way, had an unusually serious and even anxious expression. Indeed it struck Lady Alice for the first time that he was looking haggard and ill. The burden was weighing upon him even more than he knew. Maurice, too, seemed absorbed in thought, so that the drive was not a particularly lively one.

They got out at the block of buildings which had once struck Lesley as so particularly ugly. Perhaps their ugliness did not impress Lady Alice so much. At any rate she made no remark upon it. Her fingers were lightly pressed upon Caspar's arm: her thoughts were occupied by him.

At the door of the block in which the club-rooms were situated, a little group of men were standing in somewhat aimless fashion, smoking and talking among themselves. Caspar recognized several of the club members in this group. "Ah," he said quietly to his wife, "they thought that I should not come." She made no answer: as a matter of fact she began to feel a trifle frightened. These rough-looking men, with their pipes, who nudged each other and laughed as she passed, were of a kind unknown to her. But Caspar walked through them easily, nodding here and there, with a cheery "Good-afternoon."

Lady Alice did not know it, but the room presented an unusual sight to her husband's eyes that afternoon. The fire was burning, and the gas was lighted, for the day was cold and damp: the comfortable red-seated chairs were as inviting as ever, and the magazines and newspapers lay in



rows upon the scarlet table-cloth. There were flowers in the vases, and a piece of music on the open piano. Lady Alice exclaimed in her pleasure, "How pretty it is! how cosy!" and wondered at the gloom that sat upon her husband's brow.

The room was cosy and pretty enough—but it was empty.

Caspar looked round mutely, then glanced at his companions. Miss Brooke paused in the act of taking off one woollen glove, and opened her mouth and forgot to shut it again. Maurice stood frowning, twitching his brows and biting his lips in the effort to subdue a torrent of rage that was surging up in his heart. He would have sworn, he said afterwards, if Lady Alice had not been there—he did not mind Doctor Sophy so much. All that he did now, however, was to mutter "Ungrateful rascals," and make as if he would turn to flee.

But he was stopped by Caspar's clutch at his arm. Maurice saw that his purpose—that of haranguing the men outside—had been divined and arrested. He turned to his friend and saw for the first time on Caspar's face that the shaft had gone home. He had shown scarcely any sign of suffering before.

"I don't deserve this from them," said Brooke quietly, and Maurice could tell that he had gone rather white about the lips. Then in a still lower voice, "Don't let her know. You were right, Maurice; I had better not have come."

"I'll just go and look outside: I won't speak to them, don't be afraid—you talk to Lady Alice," said Maurice breaking from him. But when he got into the dark little entry, he did not look outside for anything or anybody: he only relieved himself by exclaiming. "Oh, d—n the fools!" and shaking his first in a very reprehensible way at some imaginary crowd of auditors. For Maurice was half an Irishman, and his blood was up, and on his friend's behalf he was, as he would just then have expressed it, "in a devil of a rage." While he was executing a sort of mad war-dance on the jute mat in the passage, relieving his mind by some wild gesticulation and still wilder oburgation of the world, Mr. Brooke had turned back to his wife with a pleasant word and smile.

"I must show you the photographs," he said. "We are very proud of them. There will be plenty of time, for the members seem to be a little late in getting together to-day. Possibly they thought I was not coming."

"It is scarcely time yet," said Miss Brooke heroically. She knew it was ten minutes past, but she was quite prepared to sacrifice truth for the maintenance of her brother's dignity.

"That's a good one of the Parthenon," said Caspar negligently, putting his hand within his wife's arm, and leading her from one picture to another. "The Coliseum you see: not quite so clear as it might be. These frames were made by one of the men in the buildings—given as a present to the club. Not bad taste, are they? And this statuette——"

He broke off suddenly. He had been going on hurriedly and feverishly, filling up the time as best he might, trying to forget the embarrassing situation into which he had brought his wife and himself, when the sound of heavy footsteps fell upon his ear. A sound of shuffling, the creak of men's boots, a little gruff whispering in the doorway—what was it all about? Were the men whom he had helped and guided going to turn against him openly—to give him in his wife's presence some other insult beside the tacit insult of their absence? He turned round sharply, with the feeling that if he was brought to bay the men would have a bad time of it. He certainly looked a formidable antagonist. The hair had fallen over his forehead, his brows were knotted, his eyes gleamed rather fiercely beneath them, his under lip was thrust out aggressively. "As fierce as a lion," said one of the observers, afterwards. But even while his eyes darted flame and fury at the men who had deserted them, his body kept its half-protecting, half-deferential pose with respect to Lady Alice; and the hand that held her arm was studiously gentle in its touch.

Lady Alice turned round, amazed. There was a little crowd in the passage: the room was already half full. Men and women too were there, and more crowded in from behind. There must have been nearly fifty, when all were seen, and there were more men than women. But they did not sit down: they stood, they leaned against the walls; one or two mounted on the benches at the back and stood where they could get a good view of the proceedings. Caspar's scowl remained fixed, but it was a scowl of astonishment. He looked round for Maurice, whom he presently saw beckoning to him to take his usual place near the piano. He said a word to his wife, and brought her round

with him towards his sister and his friend. The men still stood, and crowded a little nearer to him as he reached his place. There was very little talking in the room, and the men's faces looked somewhat solemn: it was evidently a serious occasion.

"Is this—this—what usually goes on?" queried the puzzled Lady Alice.

"This? Oh no!" said Maurice, to whom she had addressed herself, with a sudden happy laugh, and a perfectly beaming face. "*This* is—a demonstration. Here, Caspar, old man, you've got to stand here. *Now*, Gregson."

Lady Alice accepted the chair offered to her, and Miss Brooke another. Caspar began to look utterly perplexed, but a little relieved also, for his eye, in straying over the crowd, had recognized two or three faces as those of intimate friends who seemed to be mingling with the men, and he felt sure that they had no inimical purpose towards him. All that he could do was to look down and grasp his beard, as usual, while Jim Gregson, the man who had once spoken to Lesley so warmly of her father, being pushed forward by the crowd as their spokesman, addressed himself to Caspar.

"Mr. Brooke—Sir: We have made bold to change the order of the proceedings for this 'ere afternoon. Instead of beginning with the music, we just want to say a few words; and that's why we've come in all at once, so as to show that we are all of one mind. We think, sir, that this is a very suitable opportunity for presenting you with a mark of our—our gratitude and esteem. We have always found you a true friend to us, and an upright man that would never allow the weak to be trampled on, nor the poor to be oppressed, and we wish to show that whatever the newspapers may say, sir, we have got heads on our shoulders and know a good man when we see him." This sentence was uttered with great emphasis, to an accompaniment of "Hear, hear," from the audience, and considerable stamping of feet, umbrellas and sticks. "What we wish to say, sir," and Mr. Gregson became more and more embarrassed as he came to this point, "is that we respect you as a man and as a gentleman, and that we take this opportunity of asking you to accept this small tribute of our feelings towards you, and we wish to say that there's not a member of the club as has not contributed his mite towards it, as well as many

poor neighbors in the Buildings. It's a small thing to give, but that you will excuse on account of the shortness of the notice, so to speak: the suggestion having been made amongst ourselves and by ourselves only three days ago. We beg you'll accept it as a token of respect, sir, from the whole of the Macclesfield Buildings Working Men's Club, of which you was the founder, and which we hope you'll continue for many long years to be the president *of*." And with a resounding emphasis on the preposition, Mr. Gregson finished his speech. A tremendous salvo of applause followed his last word, and before it had died away a woman was hastily dragged to the front, with a child—a blue-eyed fairy of two or three years old—in her arms. The child held a brown paper parcel, and presented it with baby solemnity to Mr. Brooke, who kissed her as he took it from her hands. And then, under cover of more deafening applause, Mr. Brooke turned hurriedly to Maurice and said, in a very unheroic manner—

"I say, I can't stand much more of this. I shall make a fool of myself directly."

"Do: they'll like it, the beggars!" returned Maurice in high glee.

But he had more sympathy in his eyes than his words expressed, and the grip that he gave his friend's hand set the audience once more applauding enthusiastically. An audience of Londoners with whom a speaker is in touch is one of the most sympathetic and enthusiastic in the world.

While they applauded, the parcel was opened. It contained a morocco case, lined with dark blue satin and velvet—an unromantic and prosaic expression of as truly high and noble feeling as ever found a vent in more poetic ways—and on the velvet cushion lay—twelve silver spoons!

There was an odd little touch of bathos about it, and an outsider might perhaps have smiled at the way in which the British workman and his wife had chosen to manifest their faith in the man who had been in their eyes wrongfully accused; but nobody present in the little assembly saw the humorous side of it at all, not even a young gentleman who was hastily making a sketch of it for the *Graphic*, for he blew his nose as vigorously as anybody else. And there was a good display of handkerchiefs and some rather troublesome coughing and choking in the course of the afternoon, which showed that the donors of

the spoons did not look on the gift exactly in the light of a joke.

Mr. Brooke was a practised speaker; and when he opened his lips to reply, his sister dried her eyes and put down her handkerchief with a gratified smile as much as to say, "Now we shall have a treat." And she settled herself so that she could watch the effect of the speech on Lady Alice, who had forgotten to wipe her tears away, and sat with eyelashes wet and cheeks slightly flushed, looking astoundingly young and pretty in the excitement of the moment. But Miss Brooke was doomed to be disappointed. Caspar began once, twice, thrice—and broke down irrevocably. The only intelligible words he got out were, "My dear friends, I can't tell you how I thank you." And that was quite true: he couldn't.

But there was all the more applause, and all the more kindly feeling for that failure of his to make a speech; and then one or two other men spoke of the good that Mr. Brooke had done in that neighborhood, and of the help that he had given them all in founding the club, and of the brave and encouraging words that he had spoken to them, and so on; and the young artist for the *Graphic* sketched away faster and faster, and said to himself, "My eye, there'll be a precious row if they try to hang him after this, whatever he's done." But the sensation of the afternoon was yet to come.

"I can only say once more, my friends," said Caspar, as the hour wore away, "that I thank you for this expression of your confidence in me, and that I have never had a prouder moment in my life than this, in which you tell me of your own accord that you believe in my innocence of the crime attributed to me. Of that, however, I will not speak. I wish only, before we separate, to introduce you to my wife, who has never been here before, and whom I am sure you will welcome for my sake."

There was a moment of astonishment. Every one knew something of the story of Caspar's married life, and was taken aback by the appearance of his wife. But when Maurice Kenyon led the way by clapping his hands vigorously, someone took up the word, and cried, "Three cheers for Mrs. Brooke." And Lady Alice started at the new title, and thought that it sounded much better than the one by which she was usually known.

"Shall I say any more?" said Caspar, smiling as he stooped down to her. But suddenly she rose to her feet and put her hand within his arm. "No," she said, "I am going to do it myself."

The storm of clapping was renewed and died away when it was perceived that Lady Alice was about to speak. She was a little flushed, but perfectly self-possessed, and her clear silvery voice could be heard in every corner of the room.

"I wish to thank you, too," she said, "for your kindness to my husband and myself. I hope I shall know more of his work here by and by, and in the meantime I can only tell you that you are right to trust him and believe in him—as I trust him and believe in him with all my heart and soul!"

She turned to him a little as she spoke, her eyes shining, her face transfigured—the faith in her making itself manifest in feature and in gesture alike. There was not applause so much as a murmur of assent when she had done; and Caspar, laying hold of her hand, looked down at her with a new warmth of tenderness, and said half wonderingly,

"Why, Alice!"

"Do you think I could let them go without telling them what you are to me?" she said, with a kind of passion in her voice which reminded him of Lesley. But there was no time to say more, for every person in the room presented himself or herself to shake hands with Caspar and his wife, and to admire the spoons, which had been purchased only the night before.

"Very glad to see you amongst us, Mrs. Brooke, mum; and hope you'll come again," was heard so often that Lady Alice was quite amazed by the warmth of the greeting. "And the young lady too—where's she? she ought to have been here as well," said one woman; to which Maurice Kenyon responded in a pleased growl—

"Yes, confound your blundering, so she ought; and so she would have been, if you hadn't nearly made such a blessed mull of the whole affair."

He did not think that anybody heard him, and was rather taken aback when Lady Alice smiled at him over her shoulder. "What do you mean, Mr. Kenyon?" she said.

Maurice was on his good behavior immediately. "Oh, nothing, Lady Alice; only that Miss Brooke might have been here if we had only had a hint beforehand, and it is a pity she should have missed it."

"A great pity," said Lesley's mother; and she looked quite complacently at the twelve silver spoons, which she was guarding so jealously, as if she feared they would be taken away from her.

Outside the doors, when the assembly had reluctantly dispersed, after an improvised collation, given by Caspar, of hot drinks and plum cake, a little crowd of men and boys cheered the departing hero of the day so valiantly that Lady Alice was almost glad to find herself once more driving through the dusky London streets with her husband at her side. Miss Brooke and Maurice had elected to walk home.

"There's one thing," said Caspar, rather later in the day, as a history of these experiences was unfolded to Lesley; "we quite forgot to tell the good folks your mother's name and title. She was applauded to the echo as 'Mrs. Brooke.'"

"Oh, you must never tell them," said Lady Alice, hastily. "I do not want to be anything else, please—now."

"I wish they had let one know beforehand," said Maurice, "they kept it a dead secret—even from me."

"All the greater surprise for us," said Mr. Brooke. Then he looked at Maurice for a moment, and smiled. But it was long before they mentioned to each other what both had thought and felt in that heart-breaking minute of suspense when they believed that Caspar was deserted in the hour of need.

"Well," said Caspar Brooke, at length, "whatever may happen now"—and he made a pause which was fraught with graver meaning than he would have cared to put into words—"I can feel at any rate that 'I have had my say.' And you, Alice—well, my dear, you will always have those silver spoons to look at! So we have not done badly after all."

Like Sir Thomas More, he would have joked when going to the scaffold; but jokes under such circumstances have rather a ghastly sound in the ears of his family.

## CHAPTER XL.

CAIN.

MAURICE KENYON took an early opportunity of asking Lady Alice whether she would recognize the man Smith if she saw him again.

"I think so. Why do you ask? You know I talked to him a good deal."

"I have been very blind," said Maurice seriously. "I never thought until to-day of associating him in my mind with someone else—someone whom I have seen twice during the past week. May I speak freely to you? You know I am as anxious as anyone can possibly be that this mystery should be cleared up. I wish to speak of Francis Trent, the brother of Oliver Trent, and the husband of the woman who makes this accusation against Mr. Brooke."

Lady Alice recoiled. "You cannot mean that John Smith had anything to do with him?"

"I have a strong belief that John Smith and Francis Trent are one and the same. To my shame be it spoken, I did not recognize him either on Wednesday or Friday when I paid him a visit. Ethel wished me to go when she heard that he was ill." He said this in a deprecating tone.

"I quite understand. You saw this man—Francis Trent—then?"

"Yes, and could not imagine where I had seen him before. I think it is the man I used to see in hospital. Lady Alice—if you saw him yourself——"

"I, Mr. Kenyon? What! see the man and woman who accuse my husband of murder?"—There was genuine horror in her tone. "How could I speak to them?"

"It is just a chance," said Maurice, in a low voice. "If he knew that *you* were the wife of the man who was accused—perhaps something would come of it."

"What do you mean?"



"Lady Alice, pray do not build too much on what I am going to say. If Francis Trent and John Smith be the same, then my knowledge of John Smith's previous condition leads me to think it quite possible that it was Francis Trent who, in a fit of frenzy, committed the murder of which your husband is suspected."

Lady Alice looked at him in silence. "I don't see exactly," she said, "that I should be of much use."

"Nor I—exactly," said Maurice. "But I see a vague chance; and I ask you—for your husband's sake—to try it."

"Ah, you know I cannot refuse that," she said quickly. And then she arranged with him where they should meet on the following afternoon in order to drive to the lodgings now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Francis Trent. Whether this proceeding might not be stigmatized as "tampering with witnesses," Maurice and Lady Alice neither knew nor cared. If Maurice had a doubt, he stifled it by telling himself that they were not going to visit the "witness," Mary Trent, but the sick man, John Smith, in whom Lady Alice had been interested at the hospital. It was only as a precaution that he took with him young Mr. Grierson, junior partner of the firm of solicitors to whom Caspar's defence was entrusted. Young Grierson was a friend as well as a lawyer, and it was always as well to have a friend at hand. But really he hardly knew for what result he hoped.

The rooms in which Maurice himself, at Ethel's instance, had located Mr. and Mrs. Francis Trent were in Bernard Street. They were plain but apparently clean and comfortable. Maurice said a word to the servant, and unceremoniously put her aside, and walked straight into the room where he knew that Francis Trent was lying.

A thin, spare woman, with a deadly pale face and black sunken eyes, rose from a seat beside the bed as they entered. Lady Alice knew, as if by instinct, that this was Mary Trent. She averted her eyes from the woman who had falsely accused her husband: she could not bear to look at her. But Mary Trent scarcely took her eyes off Lady Alice's face.

"Will you look here, Lady Alice, if you please?" said Maurice in his most professional tone. She turned towards the bed, and saw—yes, it was the face of the man whom she had known in the hospital: thinner, yellower, more

haggard than ever, but still the face of the patient who used to watch her as if her presence were a means of healing in itself.

"Yes," she said slowly, "that is—John Smith."

"His real name is Francis Trent," said Maurice. "Do you know this lady, Francis?"

The sick man nodded. There was a curiously vacant look upon his face, brightened only at times by gleams of vivid consciousness.

"Yes, yes, I know her. The lady that came to see me in hospital," he murmured feebly.

"Do you know who she is?"

"Why do you trouble him, sir?" said Mrs. Trent. "You see how ill he is, wouldn't it be better for him to be left in peace?"

She spoke with sedulous calmness; but there was a jar in her voice which did not sound quite natural. Maurice simply repeated his question, and Francis Trent shook his head.

"She is the wife of Caspar Brooke, the man who, you say, killed your brother Oliver."

The sick man's eyes dilated, and fixed themselves uneasily on his wife. "I did not say it," he answered, almost in a whisper. "Mary said it—not I."

"But you heard something, did you not?" said Maurice remorselessly.

"How should he hear anything," said Mary Trent, "and he asleep in his bed at the time? Or if not asleep, too ill and weak to notice anything. It's a shame to question him like that; and not legal, neither. You'll please to leave us to ourselves, sir; we ain't a show. We can but say what we saw and heard, whatever the consequences may be, but we need not be tortured for all that."

"That's enough, Mary," said the man speaking from the bed in a much more natural manner and in a stronger voice than he had yet used. "You're overdoing it—you always do. It's no good. This is the last stroke, and I give up. It has gone against the grain with me to get anybody into trouble," he said, looking attentively at Lady Alice, "and now that I know who this lady is, I don't feel inclined to keep up the farce any longer. I am much too ill to live to be hanged—Mr. Kenyon can tell you so at any minute—and I may as well give you the satisfaction of

knowing that Caspar Brooke had nothing at all to do with Oliver's death : I was his murderer, and no one else : I swear it, so help me God ! ”

Lady Alice turned very faint. Someone put her in a chair and fanned her, and when she came to herself she heard Francis Trent's wife speaking.

“ He's mad, I tell you. It's no good paying any attention to what he says, gentlemen. I saw him myself in his bed at the time, and——”

“ Now, Mary, my dear good soul,” said Francis with the old easy superiority which he had always assumed to her, “ will you just hold your tongue, and let me tell my own tale ? You have done your best for me, but you know I always told you I was not to be trusted to lie about it if anybody appealed to me to evidence. I really have not the strength to keep it up. I want at least to die like a gentleman.”

“ I am not at all sure that you are going to die,” said Maurice quietly, with his finger on the sick man's pulse. Francis had put off the vacant expression, and his eyes had lighted up. He was evidently quite himself again.

“ No ? ” he said easily. “ Well, I would rather die, if it's all the same to you ; because I fancy I shall have to be put under restraint if I do live. I don't always know what I am doing in the least. I know now, though. You can bear me out, doctor, isn't my brain in a very queer state ? ”

“ I fear it is,” said Maurice.

“ Just so. I am subject to fits of rage in which I don't know what I am doing. And on that night when Oliver came to see me, after Brooke had gone away, I got into one of these frenzies and followed him downstairs, picking up Brooke's stick on the way and beating poor Oliver about the head with it. . . . You know well enough how he was found. I only came to myself when it was done. And then, my wife—with all a woman's ingenuity—bundled me into bed, swore that I had never left it, and that Caspar Brooke had done it. It was a lie—she told me so afterwards. Eh, Mary ?—Forgive me, old girl : I've got you into trouble now ; but that is better than letting an innocent man swing for what I have done, especially when that man is the husband of one who was so kind to me——”

“ And the father of Lesley Brooke,” said Maurice, looking steadfastly at Mary Trent.

A shudder ran through the woman's frame. Then she covered her face with her hands and flung herself down at her husband's side.

"Oh Francis, my dear, my dear!" she said. "I did it for you."

And then for an instant there was silence in the room, save for her heavy sobs. Francis lay still but patted her with his thin fingers, and looked at Caspar Brooke's wife with his large, unnaturally bright, dark eyes.

"She is a good soul in spite of it all," he said, addressing himself to Lady Alice. "And she did it out of love for me. You would have done as much for your husband, perhaps, if you loved him—but I have heard that you don't."

"Oh, but you are wrong," said Lady Alice. "I love him with all my heart, and I thank you deeply—deeply—for saving him."

"That ought to be some payment," said Francis Trent, with his wan, wild smile. "And I don't suppose they'll be very hard on me, as I did not know what I was doing. You'll speak a word to that effect, won't you, doctor?"

"I will indeed. But it would have been better for you as well as for others if truth had been told from the beginning," said Kenyon.

"It can't be helped now. Is there anything else I can do? You must have my statement taken down. And Mary, my girl, you'll have to make your confession too."

"Oh, Francis, Francis!" she moaned. "Not against you, my dear—not against you!"

"Yes, against me," said Francis steadily. "And let us finish with the formalities as quickly as may be, doctor, as long as my head's clear. I killed my brother Oliver—that you must make known as soon as you can. Not for malice, poor chap, nor yet for money—though he had cheated me many a time—but because I was mad—mad. And I am mad now—mad though you do not know it—stark, staring mad!"

And his dark eyes glared at them so strangely that Lady Alice cried out and had to be led into another room, for it was the light of madness indeed that shone from beneath his sunken brows.

It was while she sat alone for a minute or two while the gentlemen were talking in another room, that Mary Trent

came creeping to her, with folded hands and furtive mien.

"Oh, my lady, my lady, forgive me," she said, sobbing fretfully as she spoke. "I thought but of my own—I did not think of you. Nor of Miss Lesley, though I did love her—yes, I did, and tried my best to save her from that wicked man. Mr. Brooke will tell you what I mean, ma'am. And tell him, if you will be so good, that I was frightened into taking back the stories I had told him about Oliver—but they were *all true*. Everyone of 'em was true. And that I beg he'll forgive me; for a better and a kinder gentleman I never see, nor one that loved poor people more. And Miss Lesley was just like him—but it was my husband, and I thought he'd be hanged for it, and what could I do?"

And then, while Lady Alice still hesitated between pity and a feeling of revolt at pity for a woman who had sworn falsely against her dearly beloved husband, Caspar Brooke, a cry was heard from the bedroom, and Mary turned and fled back to the scene of her duties—sad and painful duties indeed, sometimes, when the madman became violent, and likely enough to be very speedily terminated by death.

"What can I say to you?" said Lady Alice to Maurice Kenyon, a day or two later. "It was your acuteness that brought the matter to light. Now that that poor wretched man is hopelessly insane, we might never have learnt the truth. Is there any way in which I can thank you? any way in which I can give you a reward?"

She looked steadily into his face, and saw that he changed color.

"There is only one way, Lady Alice," he stammered.

"You are not to call me Lady Alice: I like 'Mrs. Brooke' much better. Well?"

"I love your daughter," said Maurice bluntly, "and I believe she would love me if you would let her."

"Let her?" said Mrs. Brooke, with a smile.

"She made you some promises before she came to London——"

"Ah, not to become engaged before the year was out. Tell her that I absolve her from that promise, and—ask her again."

Maurice found that under these conditions Lesley's answer was all that could be desired.

## CHAPTER XLI.

VALE !

"Now that Ethel has gone to the sea-side, I can have you to myself a little while," said Lady Alice to her daughter.

"Poor Ethel ! But it is delightful to have you here, mamma : it is so home-like and comfortable."

"Ah, you will soon have to make a home for somebody else !"

Lesley grew red, but smiled. "We won't think of that yet," she said softly. "Mamma, I want to speak to you on a very serious subject."

"Well, my darling ?"

"You won't be angry with me, will you ? It is—about Mrs. Romaine."

Lady Alice's brow clouded a little. "Well, Lesley ?" she said.

"Mamma, I can't bear Mrs. Romaine myself. Neither can you. Neither can papa. And it is very unchristian of all of us, to say the least. Because——"

"Neither can papa," repeated Lady Alice, with raised brows. "My dear child, Mrs. Romaine is a great friend of your father's. He told me only the other day that she used to come here very often—to see your Aunt Sophy and yourself."

"So she did," said Lesley, lightly. "But, of course, she can't very well come now—at least, it would be awkward. Still I am sure papa does not like her, for he looked quite pleased the other day when I told him that she was going to give up her house, and said in his short way—'So much the better.'"

"Very slight evidence," said Caspar Brooke's wife smiling.

"Well, never mind evidence, mammy dear. What I want to say is that I feel very sorry for Mrs. Romaine. You see she must be feeling very much alone in the world. Oliver, whom she really cared for, is dead, and Francis is

out of his mind, and Francis' wife"—with a little shudder—"cannot be anything to her—and then, don't you think, mamma, that when there has been *one* case of insanity in the family, she must be afraid of herself too?"

"Not necessarily. Francis Trent's insanity was the result of an accident."

"Yes, but it is very saddening for her, all the same, and she must be terribly lonely in that house in Russell Square. I wanted to know if I might go and call upon her?"

"You, dear? I thought you did not like her."

"I don't," said Lesley, frankly, "but I am sorry for her. Ethel asked me why I did not go. She thought there must be something wrong, because Rosalind never came to see her after Oliver's death—never once. I believe she has scarcely been out of the house—not at all since the funeral, and that is a month ago. I have not heard that she was ill, so I suppose it is just that she is—miserable, poor thing."

Lady Alice stroked her daughter's hair in silence for a minute or two. "I think I had better go instead of you, Lesley. There is no reason why she should feel she cannot see us. She was not to blame for that accusation—though I heard that she believed it. But I will see her first, and you can go afterwards if she is able to receive visitors."

"That is very good of you, mamma—especially as you don't like her," said Lesley. "I can't help feeling thankful that Ethel will have nothing to do with that family now. And since Maurice told her a little more about poor Mr. Trent, I think she sees that she would not have been very happy." She was silent for a little while, and then went on, trying to give an indifferent sound to her words:—"Captain Duchesne's people live near Eastbourne, he told me; and Ethel has gone to Seaford."

"Not far off," said Lady Alice, smiling a little. "I hope that his sister Margaret will call on Ethel: I think they would like each other."

And no more was said, for it was as yet too early to wonder even whether Harry Duchesne's adoration for Ethel Kenyon was ultimately to meet with a return.

True to her new tastes, Lady Alice had had cards printed bearing the name "Mrs. Caspar Brooke." She desired, she said, to be identified with her husband as

much as possible : it was a great mistake to retain a mere courtesy title, as if she had interests and station remote from those of her husband. Caspar had smilingly opposed this change, but Lady Alice had stood firm. Indeed, to her old friends she remained "Lady Alice" to the end of the chapter ; but to the outer world she was henceforth known as Mrs. Brooke.

She sent up one of her new cards when she called upon Mrs. Romaine. She paid this visit with considerable shrinking of heart. She had bitter memories connected with Mrs. Romaine. Since the day on which she had been reconciled to her husband, she had cast from her all suspicion of his past—cast it from her in much the same arbitrary and unreasoning manner as she had first embraced it. For, like most women, she was governed far more by her feelings and instincts than by the laws of evidence. As Rosalind had once told her brother, Lady Alice had accidentally seen and intercepted a letter of hers to Caspar ; and Lady Alice had then rushed to the conclusion that it was part of a long continued correspondence and not a single communication. And now—now—what did she think ? She hardly knew ; of one thing only was she certain that Caspar had never been untrue to her, had never cared for any woman but herself.

She was not at all sure that Mrs. Romaine would receive her : she knew that she had written to her in a tone that no woman, especially a woman like Mrs. Romaine, is likely to forgive ; but time, she thought, blunts the memory of past injuries, and if Rosalind chose to forget the past, she would forget it too. It was with a soft and kindly feeling, therefore, that Lady Alice asked for admittance at Mrs. Romaine's door, and learned that Mrs. Romaine was at home and would see her.

Before she had been in the drawing-room five minutes, it dawned on Lady Alice's mind that there was something odd in her hostess' manner and even in her appearance. Of course she was prepared for a change ; in the twelve years or more that had elapsed since they had met she herself must have also changed. But, as a matter of fact, Lady Alice's long, elegant figure, shining hair and delicate complexion showed the ravages of time far less distinctly than she imagined ; while Mrs. Romaine was a mere wreck of what she had been in her youth. During the last few



weeks, Rosalind had grown thin : her features were sharpened, her hands white and wasted : her eyes seemed too large for her face, and were surmounted by dark and heavy shadows. Lady Alice was reminded of another face that she had last seen relieved against the whiteness of a pillow, of eyes that had gleamed wildly as they looked at her, of a certain oddness of expression that in her own heart she called "a mad look." Yes, there was certainly a likeness between her and her brother Francis, and it was the sort of likeness that gave Lady Alice a shock.

For a few minutes the two women talked in platitudes of indifferent things. Lady Alice noticed that after every sentence or two Mrs. Romaine let the subject drop and sat looking at her furtively, as if she expected something that did not come. Was it sympathy that she wanted ? It was with difficulty that Lady Alice could approach the subject. After a longer pause than usual, she said softly—

"You must let me tell you how sorry I am for the sorrow that has come upon you—upon us all."

Mrs. Romaine stared at her for a moment ; an angry light showed itself in her eyes.

"You have come to tell me that ?" she said, with chill disdain.

"I came to say so—yes," Lady Alice answered, in her surprise.

"I am very much obliged to you, I am sure." The tone was almost insolent, but the woman was herself again. The oddness, the awkwardness of manner had passed away, and her old grace of bearing had come back. Even her beauty returned with the flush of crimson to her face and the lustre of her eyes. The prospect of combat brought back the animation and the brilliancy that she had lost.

"There were other things I thought that you had perhaps come to say—repetitions of what you said to me years ago—before you left your husband."

Lady Alice rose at once. "I think you had better not touch on that subject," she said gently but with dignity. "I did not come here with any such intention. I hoped all that was forgotten by you—as it is by me."

"I have not forgotten," said Mrs. Romaine, rising also, and fixing her eyes on Lady Alice's face.

"I am sorry for it. You will allow me——"

"No, do not go : stay for a minute or two, I beg of you."

I am not well—I said more than I meant—do not leave me just yet.” She spoke now hurriedly and entreatingly.

These extraordinary changes of tone and manner impressed Lady Alice disagreeably. And yet she hesitated: she did not like to carry out her purpose of leaving the house at once, when she had been entreated to remain. Looking at her, Mrs. Romaine seemed to make a great effort over herself, and suddenly put on the air that she used most to affect—the air of a woman of the world, with peculiarly engaging manners.

“Don’t hurry away,” she said. “I really have something particular to say to you. Will you listen to me for two minutes?”

“Yes—if you wish it.”

“I do wish it very much. You will stay? That is kind of you. And I will ring for tea.”

“No, please do not,” said Lady Alice shrinking instinctively from the thought of eating and drinking in Rosalind Romaine’s drawing-room; “I really cannot stay long, and I do not drink tea so early.”

Her hostess smiled and withdrew her hand from the bell-handle. “As you please,” she said indifferently. “It is so long since I had visitors that I almost forget how to entertain them. You must excuse me if I have seemed *distract* or—or peculiar. You see I have had a great deal to bear.”

“I know it, and I am very sorry,” said Lady Alice gently.

“You are very kind.” Was there a touch of satire in the tone? “And—as you are here—why should we not speak of one or two matters that have troubled us sometimes? As two women of the world, we ought to be able to come to a sort of compact.”

“I do not understand you, Mrs. Romaine.”

Rosalind laughed a little wildly. “Of course you don’t. But I do not mean to talk conventionalism or commonplace. Just for a minute or two, let us speak openly. You have come back to your husband—yes, I *will* speak, and you shall not interrupt!—and you hope no doubt to be happy with him. Don’t you know that I could wreck your whole happiness if I chose?”

The color rose in Lady Alice’s face, but she looked clearly into the other’s face as she replied—

"My happiness with my husband is not dependent on anything that you may do or say. I really cannot discuss the subject with you, Mrs. Romaine, it is most unsuitable."

"You are very impatient," said Rosalind satirically. "I only want to make a bargain with you. If you will do something that I want, I promise you that I will go away from London and never speak to any of your family again."

Lady Alice's alarm struggled for mastery with her pride and her sense of the becoming, both of which told her not to parley with this woman. But the temptation to a naturally exacting nature was very great. She hesitated for a moment, and Mrs. Romaine went rapidly on.

"I wrote a letter once." The hot color mounted to her cheeks and brow while she was speaking. "You wrote to me about it. But you did not send it back. You have that letter still."

Lady Alice continued to look at her steadily, but made no reply.

"That letter has been the curse of my life. I repented it as soon as it was sent—you may be sure of that: I could repeat it word for word even now. Oh, no doubt you made the most of it—jeered at it—laughed over it with *him*—but to me——"

"It is the last thing I should ever have mentioned to my husband," said Lady Alice, with grave disdain. "He never knew that you wrote it—never saw it—never will see or know it from *me*."

"Do you mean that you have kept it to yourself all these years?"

"I mean that I put it into the fire as soon as I had read it. Why are you so concerned about it? Was it worse than the others that you must have written—before that?"

"I never wrote to him before."

They faced each other with mutual suspicion in their eyes. Lady Alice had forgotten her proud reserve: she wanted to know the truth at last.

"I will acknowledge," she said, "that I believed that you had written other letters—of a somewhat similar kind—to Mr. Brooke. I was angry and disgusted: it was that which formed one of my reasons for leaving him years ago. But I have come to a better mind since then. I do not care what you wrote, what you said, or what you did: I believe that my husband is a good man and I love him. I

have come back to him, and shall never leave him again. You can do me no harm now."

Mrs. Romaine laughed mockingly. "Can I not?" she said. "Do you know that he came to me within an hour after his release? Do you know that he asked me to go away with him to Spain, where we could be safe and happy together? What do you say to that?"

"I say this," cried Lady Alice, almost violently, "that I do not believe a word of it." She drew herself to her full height and turned to leave the room. Then she looked at Rosalind and spoke in a gentler tone. "I am sorry for you," she said. "But your suffering is partly your own fault. What right had you to think of winning my husband's heart away from me? You have not succeeded, although you have done your best to make us miserable. I have never spoken of you to him—never; but now, when I go home, I shall go straight to him and tell him all that you have said to me, and I shall know very well whether what you say is false or true."

She left the room proudly and firmly, unheeding of the mocking laugh that Rosalind sent after her. She let herself out into the street and walked straight back to her home. Caspar was out: she could not go to him immediately, as she had said that she would do. She went to her room and lay down upon the bed, feeling strangely tired and weak. In spite of her haughty rebuttal of the charge against her husband, she was wounded and oppressed by it. And as the time went on, she felt more and more the difficulty of telling him her story, of asking him to clear himself. How could she question him without seeming to doubt?

She fretted herself until a headache came on, and she was unable to go down to dinner. Lesley brought her up a cup of tea, but her mother refused her company. "I shall be better alone," she said. "Has your father come in yet? Isn't he very late?"

It was nearly ten o'clock when Mr. Brooke came in, and, hearing that he had been asked for, made his way to his wife's room. He bent over her tenderly, asking her how she felt; and she put one hand up to his rough cheek, without answering.

"What has made your head ache, my darling?" he asked.

"Caspar, I have been to see Mrs. Romaine."

She felt a sort of start or quiver go through him at the

name. He put his lips softly to her forehead before he spoke. "Well!" he said, a little dryly.

"Did you—did she——"

Then she broke down, and sobbed a little with her face against her husband's breast. Caspar's breath grew shorter—a sign of excitement with him—but for a time he waited quietly and would not speak. He could not all at once make up his mind what to say.

"Alice," he said at last, "if you ask me questions I suppose I must answer them in one way or another. But—I think I had rather you did not." He felt that every nerve was strained in self-control as she listened to him. "Mrs. Romaine," he went on deliberately, "is not a woman that I like—or—respect. I would very much prefer not to talk about her."

"I must tell you just one thing," she whispered, "it was my feeling about her—my jealousy of her—that made me leave you—twelve years ago."

She had surprised him now. "Alice! Impossible," he said. "Why, my poor girl, there was not the slightest reason. I can most solemnly swear to you, Alice, that I never had any other feeling for Mrs. Romaine than that of ordinary friendship. My dear, will you never believe that you have always been the one woman in all the world for me?"

"Forgive me, Caspar," she murmured, "I do believe it now."

At the same hour, a haggard and despairing woman raised herself from the floor where she had lain for many weary hours, trying by passionate tears and cries and outbursts of unavailing lamentation to exhaust or stifle the anguish which seemed to have reached its most intolerable point. Her robes were soiled and crushed, her hair was dishevelled, her eyes were red with weeping; and, as she rose, she wrung her hands together and then raised them in appeal to the God whom she had so long forgotten and forsaken.

"Oh, my God," she cried, "how can I bear it? All that I do is useless. I may lie and cheat and plot as much as I like, but all my schemes are in vain. I cannot hurt her, as she said: I cannot punish him: I have no power left. No power, no beauty, no will! Am I losing my senses, too, like Francis?" She shuddered at the thought. "Perhaps I am going mad—they have driven me mad,

Caspar Brooke and his wife, between them—mad, mad, mad!—Oh, God,” she said, with a long shivering sigh, “Oh, God, avert *that* doom! Not that punishment of all others, for mercy’s sake!”

She looked up and down her dimly lighted room with an expression upon her face of horror and unrest, which bore some resemblance to the look of one whose intellect was becoming unhinged. It seemed as if she were afraid that something might leap out upon her from the darkness, or as if goblin voices might at any moment mutter in her ear. For a long time she stood motionless in the middle of the room, her eyes staring, her hands hanging at her sides. Then she moved slowly to a writing-table, took a sheet of paper and a pen, and wrote a few lines. When she had finished she enclosed the sheet in an envelope, and addressed it to Lady Alice Brooke. And when that was done she rang the bell and sent the letter to the post. Then she nodded and smiled strangely to herself.

“Perhaps that will atone,” she murmured vaguely. “And perhaps God will not take away my reason, after all.”

And then she began to fumble among the things upon her dressing-table for the little bottle that contained her nightly sleeping draught.

Mrs. Romaine’s letter was brought to Lady Alice before she rose next morning. It contained these words:—

“I told you what was not true to-day. Your husband never asked me to go away with him—he never cared for me. I loved him, that was all. His carelessness drove me mad—I tried to revenge myself on him by making you suffer. But you would not believe me, and you were right. Pity me if you can, and pray for me.

“ROSALIND ROMAINE.”

“Ah, poor soul!” thought Alice Brooke, her eyes filling with tears. “I do pity her—I do, with all my heart. God help her!”

And she said those words again—useless as they might be—when, by and by, a messenger came hurrying to the house with the news that Mrs. Romaine had been found dead that morning—dead, from an overdose of the chloral which she kept beside her for sleeplessness. And so the

life of false aims and perverted longings came to its appointed end.

There was never a cloud on Alice Brooke's domestic happiness, never a shadow of distrust between her and her husband, after this. For some little time they changed their mode of life—giving up the house in Bloomsbury and spending long, blissful months in Italy and the Tyrol. It was like another honeymoon. And when they returned to London, Caspar took a house in a sunnier and pleasanter region than Upper Woburn Place, but not so far away as to prevent him from visiting the Macclesfield Club on Sundays, and having a chat with Jim Gregson and his other workman friends. These workmen and their wives came also in their turn to Mr. Brooke's abode, where there was not only a gentle and gracious lady to preside at the table (where twelve especially valued silver spoons always held a place of honor), but a very remarkable baby in the nursery; and it was Mr. Brooke's continual regret that he had not insisted on naming his son and heir Macclesfield, after the workmen's buildings, instead of the more commonplace Maurice, after Maurice Kenyon. But Maurice and Lesley returned the compliment by calling their eldest child Caspar, although Lesley did say saucily that she thought it a very ugly name.

Francis Trent was in a lunatic asylum, "at Her Majesty's pleasure." His wife was allowed to see him now and then; and on this account she would not leave England, as some of her friends urged her to do, but occupied herself with needlework and some kind of district visiting among the poor. The Brookes and the Kenyons were both exceedingly kind to her, and would have been kinder if she had felt it possible to accept "their kindness"; but, although she cherished in secret a strong affection for Lesley, she was too much ashamed of her past conduct ever to present herself to them again. She could but live and work in silence, until one of the two great healers, Time or Death, should soothe the bitterness of her heart away.

And Ethel?—Well, Mrs. Harry Duchesne knows more about Ethel than I do, and I shall be happy to refer you to her. / 2 6

THE END.







